



The Spirit of Human Business

How to Rediscover Our Human Being
to Shape Our Future

Thomas Juli, Ph.D.
foreword by Stephen Denning



“People are the key ingredient of any organization. When treated with respect and dignity, they help their organization succeed in the marketplace. Thomas does a masterful job reminding us of how to treat people with humanity so that they bring their full energy to work. The Spirit of Human Business has many exceptional ideas, cases, and tools for anyone committed to creating a more humane workplace.”

**Dave Ulrich,
Rensis Likert Professor, Ross School of Business, University of
Michigan; Partner, The RBL Group**

“The pandemic has brought forward a realization of the importance of our soft powers that include empathy, compassion, listening and team building. If we want to increase humanity in the workplace, we have to recognize employees as “100% humans and just not resources.” Dr. Juli shares powerful insights and tools to help leaders redirect their strategies during a time when these qualities need to take precedence over just getting it done.”

**Shelley Zalis,
CEO, The Female Quotient**

“Peter Drucker always said that management had a dual responsibility – to make institutions and society both more effective and more humane. Too often in the past, efficiency has ridden roughshod over humanity, which is why we are where we are today, with many organisations a prison for the human soul. Thomas Juli’s book is a direct and timely statement of the need to set the record straight and switch the focus from ‘technology-literate humans to ‘human-literate technology’, as the saying has it. Both thoughtful and practical, ‘The Spirit of Human Business’ is an essential guide to making Drucker’s vision a reality.”

**Richard Straub,
President, Global Peter Drucker Forum &
Peter Drucker Society Europe**

“One of the biggest challenges facing the world is sustainability ... of ecosystems, species, natural resources and the environment. It is time we add to this list the vital energy of the human beings who work in our organizations. We must honor, sustain and enrich their human energy. From this joyful energy comes the very essence of what we need the most right now: creativity, imagination, innovation and invention. In his book, Human Business, author Thomas Juli gives us a guide for sustaining and enriching the energy of the humans in our workplaces. This book is what we need. Right now. Thank you Thomas for showing us the way out of the tangled jungle of our current work environments.

**Richard Sheridan,
CEO and Chief Storyteller, Menlo Innovations**

“Business needs to be more Humane in every aspect and in service to life. Dr. Thomas Juli describes flawlessly how to bring the Golden Rule to business humanely in the digital age. The formula for regenerative and resilient organizations that will carry humanity well beyond the 21st Century. The future is very Humane.”

**Marc Buckley,
Environmentalist, Regenerative
Global Food Reformist,
Expert UN & WEF**

“Several years ago, I argued “one day every business will have to be a social enterprise,” by that I meant it would have to recognise the value customers, and all other stakeholders, as human beings instead of de-humanised ‘market segments’ and ‘assets,’ to be exploited for whatever value might be extracted from them in the pursuit of profits and returns to shareholders. Today I would go even further and say, every business IS, and always has been, a social enterprise. The desire for a false sense of control meant too many fell for the analogies that suggested business could be run like a machine. Many still do.

Dr Juli makes similar arguments, but in a much deeper and more compelling way in “The Spirit of Human Business”. Most importantly he notes the digital age amplifies both the opportunities to add great value for those who see the value in his insights or will amplify the risks to those who see business in the traditional way. Some have already recognised what needs to change and are seizing the opportunity, but the vast majority are laggards or actively resist change. The latter groups need to realise how foolish traditional thinking is.”

**Paul Barnett,
founder and CEO, Enlightened Enterprise Academy**

“Dr. Thomas Julia’s book provides us with fascinating insights into the potential and the opportunity we have to create a whole new world of work, based off a new set of principles fit for the digital age.

He makes a compelling case for the concept that the digital age is not just about technology but about us, the people, and brings us on a journey that describes how we can best embrace it. In introducing us to some really interesting models, he signposts ways we can transform our organisations and provides insights into how we can manage ourselves, to take the best of our era.

With a passion for agile practices, he shows us a new direction that humanises our whole experience, demonstrating how we can embed openness and learning into our cultures and beyond. This book challenges us to leave behind the “egotistical I” that so many workplaces fall into and embrace the “communal we”. It will take you on a journey of the humanisation of the working world, and will inspire you to consider your role in creating this new world and the greater joy we can bring to our working worlds and indeed each other. With many inspiring insights, his perspective on humanising our working world will challenge us to consider the opportunity at our disposal to fundamentally change our working practices, bravely moving in a direction that brings the best of humanity.

A must read for anyone with an interest in the future of work and a practical guide for anyone who wants to embrace the digital era, with humanity at the very core.

**Aisling Teillard,
CEO, Our Tandem**

“The Spirit of Human Business is a call for a new embodiment of the firm. It demands that we embrace ourselves and our colleagues in all of our humanity. It’s a world where men can cry and grown-ups can play, even at the office. At its core is the oldest of moral injunctions; the golden rule: do unto others as you would have done unto yourself. Imbibe this spirit!”

**Richard Atherton,
Partner, First Human, Host of Being Human podcast**

“Human Business ‘is a bridge to another economic order.”

**Gerald Hütter,
neurobiologist and author**

“For everything that is to come it will be extremely important how far we can synchronize genuine humanism with business and the economy. This is the future project of our century.”

**Matthias Horx,
trend researcher and founder
of Zukunftsinstitut, Vienna, Austria**

“The adventure of being human in the digital age urgently calls for new social and political structures and principles. For the today’s experienced reality still largely follows what was practiced in analog times. The book “Human Business” by Dr. Thomas Juli gives very important impulses for the conception of a society and politics in the digital reality.”

**Dieter Althaus,
Vice President Governmental Affairs Magna Europe,
former governor of the federal state of Thuringia**

“The book is more than a business or life guide - it is a guiding star, a compass for a new, self-directed, respectful and loving human existence. My deepest wish: May the book touch many, many people - because this is what it was written for!”

**Evelyn Oberleiter,
Co-founder and Managing Director of Terra Institute,
Brixen, South Tyrol, Italy**

“The book thinks from the end - it’s about the role of companies in a society that is about “happiness”, well-being, and quality of life.”

**Prof. Dr. Karlheinz Ruckriegel,
Happiness researcher and Professor for Economics,
Technical University Nuremberg Georg Simon Ohm, Germany**

“The complex and uncertain environment for companies requires a paradigm shift in leadership. The dogma of efficiency should not determine everything, but throughput, innovation and anti-fragility are the new guiding principles. In agile management and the associated self-organization, people with their creative, design skills have a new meaning that they must develop further in future collaboration with machines.”

**Hubertus Tuczek,
Professor for Management and Leadership,
University of Landshut, Germany**

“In the idea of” human business”, managers bring the interests of customers, employees and companies into balance - but not as the” lowest “common denominator, but as a mutually reinforcing synergy. A fascinating leadership approach that provides inspiring and meaningful orientation in times of new work confusion.”

**Erdwig Holste,
Managing Director of Management
Angels GmbH, Hamburg, Germany**

“Human Business ‘is a courageous and sensitive book that consistently puts people at the center of the entrepreneurial sense and purpose. It gives us design tools for sustainable, human life and work in the digital age. It is up to us to practice it.“

**Frank Schäfer,
HR Transformation Leader Germany & Partner,
Deloitte Consulting, Germany**

“Human Business is the call to shape the world in which our children will live, now and from now on, capable of survival, worth living in and human. Thomas Juli shows why this is necessary and how it can be achieved - in a concrete, practical and optimistic way.“

**Marcell Heinrich,
future education expert, pedagogue,
author and founder of the Hero Society, Leipzig, Germany**

“This approach nails it: humanity is the only driver to successfully meet the challenges of the new, digital and unplanned world.

“Human Business” illustrates the opportunity that we have in today’s digital age: to rediscover our own humanity in order to unfold our full potential. For personal satisfaction as well as business and society. Thanks for this book!”

**Lasse Rheingans,
Author of „The 5 Hours Revolution“**

“Dr. Thomas Juli plausibly explains why being human is the key to success in times of digital transformation. Wonderful!!”

**Torsten Bittlingmaier,
TalentManagers, Germany**

““Human Business’ comes at exactly the right time. Hopefully it will inspire many people - both in a private and in a business context - to become active contributors to the work, life and learning culture of the future.”

**Hansjörg Fetzer,
Managing Director of Haufe Akademie, Germany**

“I’ve known Thomas Juli for over 15 years: he not only writes about human business, he lives it, too!”

**Klaus Tumuscheit,
Author and project management expert, Germany**

“While other authors put human creativity at the service of algorithms that implement business models autonomously as a company operating system, Thomas Juli speaks of a new opportunity for humanism in his new book “Human Business - Living and Working in the Digital Age”. It’s an exciting outline of a time ahead of us that sees digitalization as a utopia.”

**Bernhard D. Valnion,
Editor-in-chief and Managing
Director of d1g1tal AGENDA, Germany**

“Human business is the inspiring foundation on which we can build the new economy. Deeply human and full of potential. For people, nature, meaning and the sustainable future of companies alike.”

**Stefan Götz,
Author of Change Leader Inside &
The Next Wave in Business,
Germany**

“In ten years’ time, most companies will focus on creating sustainable added value for their customers, their employees, the company itself and the environment. Dr. Thomas Juli explains why humanizing your company is becoming a competitive necessity and how you can prepare for it.”

**Peter Stevens,
Author of Personal Agility,
Zurich, Switzerland**

““The focus is on people!” How often have we heard this confession and intention, which is often used in clichés, in recent years? This book clearly shows how this expression can and has to be brought to life. A wonderful and pioneering book.”

**Michael Streng,
Executive Partner, Parameta Projektmanagement
Beratung GmbH, Germany**

“Human Business helps decision-makers to develop their company to what it was actually always intended for: by people, for people.”

**Michael Buttgerreit,
designer and founder of Gute Botschafter,
an agency for meaningful brand management, Germany**

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Foreword

by Steve Denning

The idea that our activities—whether they be in business, or in government, or in education, or in health—ought to be for the benefit of us as human beings, should not be a radical idea. The fact that the idea is not only seen as a radical but sometimes even strange and threatening shows how far we have become prisoners of our own systems and creations. The organizations that we ourselves have made, supposedly for ourselves, have often become foreign and obnoxious to us. All too often, our own organizations have tended to become Frankenstein monsters, operating according to their own mechanical agendas and, while sometimes generating generous material benefits, have also in many cases succeeded in crushing the human spirit.

It is therefore timely to have a book like Thomas Juli's *The Spirit of Human Business*, which raises, and seeks to answer, tough questions about the “why” of organizations. Why do organizations exist? What, and whose, purposes do they serve? How can we recover elements of joy, love, friendship, courage, play, and dance in our working lives where we spend so much of our brief existence on this fragile planet? How can we learn how to incorporate our concern to protect our precious environment into everything we do? How can we rediscover our humanity, and unleash our potential for creativity, not in some superficial rah-rah sheen of feigned cheerfulness, but in a deeper

heartfelt and meaningful way? How can we take the challenge of the complexity and speed of our current world and turn it into human opportunity, not merely a profit possibility? How can workplaces be evolved from what is passive and deadening to what is uplifting and stimulating? How can dreary and boring be turned into thrilling and fun? How can we generate a world of openness, inquisitiveness, vulnerability, and curiosity, all the time creating space for a journey that never ends?

These are questions that *The Spirit of Human Business* addresses systematically. The book is not a set of vague prescriptions dreamt up by a passive observer of the current scene. The book is the work of a thoughtful practitioner, who lives these challenges on a daily basis in real organizational workplaces and steadily hones his practice to grapple with the heavy questions at stake. Thomas Juli is sharing with us here the fruits of many years of reflection and effort to come to terms with, and resolve, the very real challenges we face.

Whether it is the question of how tradition meets modernity, how questions themselves can be turned into answers, how feelings and play and gratitude need to be rewoven into our working lives, or how digital technology can enhance our humanity, the book is teeming with ideas and suggestions.

The book explores what's involved in reversing a world in which technology is determining our lives into one in which our humanity drives how we use technology. It shows how the excessive demands of the VUCA world harbor opportunities. But discovering those opportunities depends on our being willing to question generally accepted assumptions about business and society. It shows how digital technology can be used as a tool for shaping our future. But first we must rediscover our humanity and become much clearer about how we want to live. As the book itself says, it is not just a book about ideas. It's a book about making the ideas possible.

Thus it's not just a book of theory. It shows how human business is already being practiced today with many examples from the U.S. and the German Mittelstand, as well social enterprises. It also shows how many medium-sized companies have some human business characteristics: whether it is a clear focus on their customers, the appreciation of staff or the acknowledgement of social responsibility.

The Spirit of Human Business is a book to study and learn from and implement its ideas. The future of our planet and our species depends on absorbing and spreading this kind of thinking.

Stephen Denning
September 29, 2021

Foreword to the German Edition (2020)

More than any other year in recent decades, 2020 was a year of change. The Corona pandemic turned our world upside down. Within a few weeks, our old lives came to a standstill. Millions of people became infected with SARS-CoV-2, hundreds of thousands died, and millions upon millions lost their jobs, future prospects, and direction as a result of the lockdowns. The initial hope that people would return to the old normal after a short time turned out to be an illusion. Countries that downplayed the crisis or tried to control it with lies and populism had to cope with even higher infection rates and more deaths as a consequence. At the time I am writing this foreword, there is no telling what the world will look like after Corona. What the “new normal” will be like. How we can and will live and work.

Corona revolutionized our lives and work from the very beginning of the pandemic. Homes for the elderly and educational institutes were forced to close. The most vulnerable age groups were isolated overnight from society, from their families and friends. Schools closed and millions of parents were faced with the challenge of homeschooling - in addition to their own jobs, which also became more difficult and/or uncertain because of Corona. Entire sectors of the economy ground to a halt and now face an uncertain future. Cultural workers, such as solo self-employed workers, and many other professional

groups have had their livelihoods pulled out from under their feet. The state did provide support measures, but they were not enough. And so the entire world of work has changed permanently in just a few weeks and months. Home office, for example, which had been viewed skeptically, especially by more traditional companies and organizations before Corona, became the standard work setting for a long time during the pandemic, at least for those for whose work it was possible, who had the technical equipment and who did not work on the “front lines” where they were exposed to Coronavirus on a daily basis. For people who continued to work in the home office, but had neither sufficient space, quiet, nor the technical equipment, time sometimes became a torment. Having more time with and in the family could thus quickly become both a blessing and a curse. Despite lockdown and social distancing, technology kept people connected to the outside world. Video conferences and webinars mushroomed.

I myself led over twenty online dialogues in the spring of 2020.¹ I would hardly have started these without Corona. What was relaxing was that no one expected these webinars to be perfectly prepared or choreographed. This meant that the focus was on the participants and the content. It was about connecting with people, sharing ideas and information. The exchange was more important than the external form. At the same time, we realized how valuable actual interpersonal encounters and exchanges were. As the lockdown slowly loosened, we enjoyed time with friends and colleagues² even more. Social distancing brought us closer, in a sense. Even spending time outside in nature or leisure activities took on a completely different quality and were much more appreciated.

In the past, we often spent our free time online, but now we were discovering the benefits of offline time, taking a book, going for a walk or talking to each other. We realized that life could also function without digitalization in between, and that going slower makes life more worth living, because you learn to live more in the present and enjoy the moment.

Nature also enjoyed this quiet time. Pollution decreased within a few weeks and nature recovered. The Neckar River, which flows by just a few hundred meters from my home, was cleaner than I had ever seen it before.

The water was not clouded by sand as usual - you could now see the bottom. Glass-clear water in Venice, too, where even dolphins swam through the lagoons. It was as if nature took a rest and wanted to thank us.

The Corona pandemic was a time when many of the problems we dealt with before, especially climate change, seemed distant. Yet they did not cease to exist. For a few months we forgot about them for a few months or repressed them because of other, more immediate concerns and problems. As the Corona crisis lasted longer than expected, they slowly re-entered our consciousness. Along with questions about what the post-Corona era would be like. How will we live? How will we work? How secure is our work? What will become of us? What future will our children and grandchildren have?

During the Corona period, we learned to appreciate technology. Thanks to the Internet, we were still connected to the outside world, able to communicate, even if only virtually, with friends and colleagues. Technology helped us to continue our lives almost normally. Let's not forget, however, that technology and the digital transformation of the last twenty to thirty years have overwhelmed many people, companies and organizations and fueled fears about the future. New developments in technology, society and the environment are often met with mistrust and skepticism. It seems that digitization is "taking over" our lives. But what about us humans? Where do we fit in? And how can we shape our future?

I have been working in the digital field for more than twenty years, in a sense helping to shape the digital transformation. I welcome this change and see more opportunities than risks in it - provided we ask the right questions. Instead of asking "What will the future look like?", I agree with the German philosopher Richard David Precht, who motivates us to ask "How do we want to live?"³. Asking how we want to shape our future instead of how we react to (future) transformations changes our perspective and opens new horizons.

The questions "How do I want to live?" or "What do I really want?" have been on my mind for a long time. I don't claim to have found all the answers. What is clear to me is that we cannot find answers to these questions in technology. We must ask ourselves and find answers

within ourselves. The Norwegian futurologist Anders Indset explains that “for all our fascination with technology and its helpful potential [...] it is essential, especially at the present time, that we deal with the issue holistically. It cannot be a matter of implementing everything that can be applied in the technology [of artificial intelligence] - rather, we must always keep the goal in mind: We humans and humanity as a whole form the center.”⁴

The question of how we want to live and work in the digital age is therefore more pressing than ever. But where do we start? We can be helped by an unchanging old principle that is rooted in our human history and unites us all: the Golden Rule of cooperation. It asks us to treat our neighbor as we would like to be treated. The Golden Rule is the only principle that applies worldwide. It is the root of every religion. If we add to the Golden Rule our immediate surroundings, our environment, we can rephrase it as follows: “Treat others and the planet as you would like to be treated.”

As I will explain in Chapter 14, the Golden Rule not only provides us with an orientation for the organization of life and work. It is a mandate for individual and collective responsibility. If we scale the Golden Rule up to the corporate level, it is a call for humane and ethical entrepreneurship. It calls for a corporate culture characterized by trust and respect. It is about the symbiosis of customers, employees and companies, who are all beneficiaries in interaction and mutual consideration, respect and support. This is Human Business.

Human Business puts people at the center; be it customer, employee, business, or social environment. The purpose of Human Business is not to maximize profits and do everything possible for the benefit of its own shareholders. Rather, the purpose of Human Business is to generate and add sustainable value for customers, employees, business, and the environment. Entrepreneurial profits are not the goal of business. They are a result. And this yield is much greater and more sustainable if we focus on people and the planet. In this respect, the Human Business approach provides us with very good guidance. In this book, I show that this is not an illusion, but is already being lived and practiced today. I hope that this practice will find millions of imitators and that the book motivates them to do so. Hence, my vision is that Human Business will have become the new, global normal by 2030.

The book is aimed at anyone who, like me, wants to explore ways to shape our lives and work in the digital age. This includes entrepreneurs, managers and executives as well as pupils, students, social workers or artists. What we have in common is an interest in and curiosity about the future - be it out of fear, a sense of responsibility, necessity, or a thirst for adventure. We also have in common the question of how we manage not to be treated as a passive resource in the digital age, but to live and work as human beings.

The question of what our future will look like or how we want to live is not new as shown by the many references in this book. Be it publications on business and leadership or on philosophy, personal development, and spirituality.

But it was above all the personal experiences and encounters with people that inspired me to write this book and left a lasting impression on me. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family. My wife Tina, my son Rea and my daughter Aiyana were a huge help. In fact, it was Rea and Aiyana who got the ball rolling for my book project by asking me why I didn't follow my heart more often and talk more openly about my dreams and desires. I admit that it was my head that held me back for a long time because I was afraid of possibly embarrassing myself or showing my vulnerable side. My children looked me straight in the heart. Fortunately, they admonished me to walk my own talk and to open and follow my heart. Without my children, I probably wouldn't have started this book for many years. Therefore, I am infinitely grateful for them and their loving admonitions and dedicate this book to them. Without them, it would not have been written. With this book, I also wanted to give Rea and Aiyana something to hold in their hands that might give them one or two aids and impulses for their own lives and work in the digital age. I hope I have succeeded. Create your future and live it and never forget where you have come from, never forget your humanity. I love you!

I would like to say a big thank you to my wife Tina. She was a more than valuable support during the entire book project. She advised me, motivated me, reflected, gave feedback, made suggestions for improvement, and inspired me. Without her help, the book would not have come to fruition. Tina, I love you!

Further, I would like to thank Monika Renn and Jim and Elizabeth Bowman for their encouragement, advice, and tips, as well as their open ear and heart over all these years.

For the book, I interviewed a variety of people who already understand what it means to be human and how to integrate your humanity into life and work. Thanks to Richard Sheridan, Malte Clavin, Dirk Gemein, Horacio Godoy, Cecilia Berra, Isabella Bayer, Kim Polman, Steve Denning and Julia von Winterfeldt.

I have been working as an Agile coach and management consultant for many years. I always get new impulses and inspiration from a group of colleagues - we meet virtually once a week for a so-called "pizza call" for half an hour. "Pizza call" because it usually takes about half an hour to eat a pizza and talk. In our "pizza call" we share our experiences in the Agile world, report successes, failures, problems, risks and opportunities, and develop new ideas. Over the years, community and friendship have developed. Thanks to Stephen Denning, Andrew Holm, Dawna Jones, Jay Goldstein, John Styffe, Nancy Van Schooenderwoert, Peter Stevens and Rod Collins.

A very big thank you to my fellow *Human Business Architects* Christopher Weber-Fürst and Sabine Schwind von Egelstein: We have already integrated the concepts of Human Business into our consulting and coaching activities and are continuously developing them further.

Thanks to Andreas Loroeh, co-founder and co-director of VorsprungatWork in Weinheim, and Torsten Bittingmaier, who put me in touch with Haufe-Verlag which published the German version of this book in November 2020. Here I found a product manager in Dr. Bernhard Landkammer, who believed in my book idea from the very beginning and convinced his colleagues at the publishing house. He found a first-class copy-editor for my book in Ursula Thum, who gave my language the right polish, pointed out gaps and thus brought the book to completion. Many, many thanks!

Thanks to my first tango teachers Isabella Bayer and Jaro Cesnik from the Tango School Tango Flores in Mannheim, who introduced me to the wonderful world of Tango Argentino. Without them, Chapter 10 "Dancing Life" would not have been possible.

Thanks to the participants in my Spring 2020 online dialogues '*Love, Life and Work in a Human World*'. Their contributions, ideas, and feedback reinforced the vision of making Human Business the normal, global norm. Many, many thanks to my guests and interviewees Christopher Weber-Fuerst, Dawna Jones, Jay Stanton Goldstein, Julia Christensen Hughes, Kim Polman, Richard Atherton, Richard Sheridan, and Sue Bingham. Thanks to all participants: Carolin Güthenke, Bernd Frye, Christian Bader, Marianne Brittijn, Christopher Weber-Fuerst, al Bower, Carly Obeng, Johna Vickers, Juan Brooks, Samran Samran, Joe Amrhein, Anastasia Zaharioudaki, Scott Gould, Naum Naumoski, Fuad Mesic, Didi Niki Shterevi, Kim Plyler, Christian Kugelmeier, Psychi Lizzie, Nuria Rojo, Brian Shoemaker, Denise Falbo, Joseph Timothy, Dawna Jones, Julia Christensen Hughes, Tim Brook, Uwe Berns, Richard Sheridan, Kim Polman, Jay Goldstein, Julia von Winterfeldt, Janke Behnen, Grzegorz Posyniak, Kate Cnatalska, Oliver Foitzik, Gudrun Seuster, Barbara Altherr, Andrea Kaul, Udo Bohdal-Spiegelhoff, Bettina Goldman, Michaela Biggs, Eva Haas, Cinzia Catani, Julia Stolba, Tanja Schättler, Nicole Weise, Laura Latka, Martin Lindhuber, Corola von Peinen, Frank Bescherer, Julia König, Tanja Nettekoven, Julia Heitland, Udo Bohdal-Spiegelhoff, Kirsten Korte, Albrecht Schwenk, Joachim Skura, Andreas Voigtländer, Thomas Walenta, Yurii Oleksiievych, Lothar Schmidt, Tatjana Korol, Vanessa Sautter, Denis Wittmaier, Tobias Clemens, Sandra Seitz, Priscilla Lavodrama, Marion Felbel, Christian Keller, Yanique Myrick, and Robert Fuchs.

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Thanks to Dagmar Schuler of Anders Agentur for the redesign of my website www.motivate2b.com, which brought and continues to bring the book and thus Human Business to the attention of a broader public.

Heidelberg, August 2020

Foreword to the English Edition (2021)

It is almost one year ago to the day that I wrote the foreword to the original German edition of this book. Back then I hoped and expected that 2021 would pave the way back to a normal life after such a long pandemic. Today, despite widespread vaccination, we are still experiencing the rise of a fourth wave. A return to normal? What “normal”? The longer the pandemic lasts, the more obvious it becomes that the old “normal” is gone for good. Clinging to the past was never a good strategy. Especially in a world which is becoming more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous by the day. Now more than ever, we need a compass which guides us through today’s challenges and shapes the future.

Business plays an important role in this endeavor. It is the beating heart at the center of our modern lives. And yet, when we look at traditional business with its focus on short-term goals, pleasing shareholders and treating people as resources, it seems that this beating heart has clogged arteries. Unless we change how business is predominantly run, we risk a collapse. As I demonstrate in this book, the “business of business” in the digital, post-covid world is no longer business itself or making a profit. The business of modern business is people, i.e., generating value for and by people. This shift in focus unleashes huge potentials: organizational, technical, and most importantly human potentials.

In the past, business treated people as resources. This worked fine for decades. However, if we continue to treat people as resources, we ought to acknowledge that these resources will have to compete with other resources such as machines, computers, artificial intelligence, you name it. When we look at the accelerating pace of digitalization, it becomes clear that this competition will increase in severity. There's no clear winner in sight, but I doubt it will be people who come out on top.

The alternative is to treat people as humans with both strengths and weaknesses and identify potentials that have yet to be unfolded and deployed. Easier said than done. To achieve this, we need to rediscover our own human being. Reclaim our humanity and use our insights to shape our lives and work. This book shows how it can be achieved and how to use those insights in real life situations: in personal life as well as in business.

I dedicated the original, German version of the book to my two children, Rea and Aiyana. For the English edition I want to extend this dedication to all children of the world who deserve and need a better, a more human world. It's our responsibility to make it happen. Human business can contribute to it. Let's work on making Human Business the new normal worldwide.

This English edition of the book would not have been possible without my friend and colleague Dawna Jones, who pointed me to the newly founded BAI Press. Thank you, Evan Leybourn and your team at BAI Press and the Business Agility Institute for your trust, as well as your effort to copy-edit and fine-tune the manuscript in record time for publication.

“The Spirit of Human Business” is mostly unchanged from the original German edition (2020). I updated statistics, added new references, and included new examples of companies and organizations that serve as role models in this time of change. May the book inspire many other individuals and organizations to follow these role models.

Heidelberg, September 2021

1. Introduction: A World In Transition

“The most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur not because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human.”

John Naisbitt, futurologist

Key points

- Human Business puts people first, not as consumers or resources, but as human beings. Business comes second.
- The book wants to help us rediscover our humanity and unleash our human creativity and potential, in life and work, for the benefit of us humans and our planet.
- We live in a VUCA world, which means that our digital age is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity/ambiguity.
- Many people are overwhelmed by the changing times. They want to be presented with quick and easy solutions instead of looking for them themselves. This is a breeding ground for populists and traditionalists.
- Traditionally managed companies, when seized by the digital VUCA wave, will reach their limits and be pushed to the wall. Old tools such as process optimization or innovation planning remain blunt and can at best provide short-term relief. They ensure neither survival nor success in the digital age.

- The excessive demands of the VUCA world harbor opportunities. Namely, opportunities to question previous assumptions in business and society, to ask different questions, to explore new ways.
- To use digitization as a tool for shaping our future, we first have to rediscover our human being and develop ideas about how we want to live.
- The book explains how we can find our way from the passive role of human resource to being human and thus actively shaping our lives - whether in our personal environment or in our careers, work and society.

This book is about us humans and how we want to shape our future. In life as well as in work. The question we must answer is: What roles do we want to play? Do we want to be the plaything of technology, perhaps using it but still only reacting to it, doing everything we can for technological change and thus supporting companies and the economy? Or do we want to be the ones who actively shape the digital age? Not for technology or companies, but for us humans? Or can we still be human at all in the digital age? And if so, what does that mean? What creative spaces could this digital age open up for us?

Today, more than ever, we must ask ourselves how we want to live as human beings. It is a question of will and design. To be able to answer it, however, we first must know what we really want - and who we actually are or want to be. Will we continue to be mere resources and consumers in the great economic entity, or do we want to take the helm as human beings?

Traditional 20th century business primarily treats us humans as resources and objects with the function of means to an end. For decades, this has worked wonderfully well and paid off. Business comes first, people second at best, be it as a consumer or as a resource.

Human Business reverses this order: People come first, not as consumers or resources, but as human beings. Business comes second.

As we will see in this book, this simple shift has far-reaching implications for shaping our future. We as people are the ones who have to shape life and work. Business becomes both the means and the end of our creative mission. But with this creative freedom comes responsibility. And to live up to it, we must be aware of what we want and who we really are.

The book wants to contribute to this. Not as a dictate, but as an impulse generator. It wants to help us rediscover our humanity and develop our creativity and our potential, in life and work, for the benefit of us humans and our planet.

The future is like a lemon

The future. Yes, what will it look like? And how will we experience it? I would like to compare it with a slice of lemon that we bite into heartily. At first, our mouths might be puckered, that's how sour the lemon is. Some of us spit it out right away; others chew and swallow the flesh with relish. Whether or how we eat and enjoy the lemon slice is therefore entirely up to our preferences, our taste and our perception. But also, on our experiences and insights. Because regardless of whether we want to eat a raw lemon or not, we can also use it in other ways - for cooking or baking, for example. So, it can have a positive benefit, even if we don't like it pure.

It is a similar story with the future knocking on our door. By the future, I mean here above all the information and digital age, often also referred to as the "fourth industrial revolution". We may have an idea of what digitalization can bring; we don't have to be quite sure. And we certainly don't like it.

By the digital age and digitization, I mean more than just the rapid and ever-faster development of technologies in recent years. The digital age is characterized by an increasingly strong networking of people, companies, and the economy, as well as politics and society. Everyone is connected to everyone else in some way and influence each other sometimes more, sometimes less. This has both positive and negative sides. Technologies and economic flows may bring us closer together, but they also make us more vulnerable to potential negative impacts of the complex interactions. Climate change is an example of this.

From the point of view of history, digitization and the fourth industrial revolution are not really all that extraordinary. Ultimately, they describe a further step in human development. The first industrialization began with the development and spread of steam engines at the end of the 18th century. When Henry Ford introduced the assembly line in about 1913, it had far-reaching effects first on the economy and then on society. The assembly line marked the beginning of the second industrial revolution. The third revolution dawned with the development of microelectronics in the mid-1970s. Here, too, the impact on the economy and society was significant. Technologi-

cal development accelerated over the last few decades, and the development of modern factories marked the beginning of the fourth industrial revolution in which we find ourselves today. Yet the fourth revolution and the digital age are much more than smart factories. Let's take a brief look at the scope of the current technological revolution.

Technologies

Hardly anything else is more fast-moving than the rapid development of new technologies. It is difficult to compile a list of new technologies, knowing full well that it could be obsolete in a very short time and at best cause a smile because some of the technologies listed have already become obsolete again. Nevertheless, it is worth a try.

Computer performance

Computing power and storage capabilities have multiplied in recent years thanks to new processes, materials and manufacturing methods. New system and data architectures enable faster, more efficient data processing. Computers are becoming faster and smaller and it is hard to imagine our daily lives without them. On the other hand, cybercrime, for example, poses new dangers for us humans and our society. Where there is light, there is also shadow.

Internet of things

Today, machines can communicate with each other - years ago, this was hardly imaginable. Today, so-called smart factories function without humans. Energy networks in cities and homes are interconnected, exchange data and virtually optimize themselves.

But here, too, there are downsides to progress. While machine data is becoming more and more important, there is growing concern about data security and the risks of data misuse. Energy networks are becoming smarter, but they are also vulnerable to cyberattacks that can paralyze an energy network for hours, days, weeks or longer - with fatal consequences for people, the economy and society.⁵

Artificial intelligence and robots

As with the Internet of Things, the rapid development in the field of artificial intelligence and robots is also remarkable. For example, people with walking disabilities can be helped to walk again. Boring, routine tasks can be

taken over by machines and thus performed faster and cheaper. People are thus given more time for creative and interpersonal activities.

This trend is not without risks. People are likely to lose their jobs to robots in many industries. Autonomous cars and trucks will permanently change mobility in our society. At the same time, they are also likely to destroy many thousands of jobs. And the question of what artificial intelligence can or will be able to do cannot be answered without a discussion about values and ethics.⁶

Biotechnology

In biotechnology, we apply science and technology to living organisms. We learn more about how living or non-living matter is modified and can then use the knowledge to develop new goods and services.⁷ “Goals include developing new or more efficient processes for producing chemical compounds and diagnostic methods.”⁸ Developments in biotechnology may move away from mass production and toward personalized treatments, such as drugs. How far biotechnology can go in this regard is, as with many other technological developments, an ethical question.

Nanotechnologies

The term nanotechnologies “encompasses [...] numerous principles from various natural and engineering sciences: from quantum physics and material sciences, from electronics and computer science, from chemistry and micro-, molecular- and cell biology. What all these technologies have in common is the scale at which everything takes place: the dimension of a few nanometers”⁹. Nanotechnologies have already contributed to serious advances in medicine, but also in the development of new materials. However, the advances are offset by feared incalculable risks. And so here, too, the question arises as to how far one may go today and in the future. This is particularly true when nanotechnology is used on living beings, as in the case of genetic engineering.

Genetic engineering

There is hardly any other technology where the curse and the blessing are so close together. “Genetic engineering refers to methods and processes of biotechnology that

build on the knowledge of molecular biology and genetics and enable targeted interventions in the genetic material and thus in the biochemical control processes of living organisms or viral genomes.”¹⁰

The effects of genetically modified seeds and foods on humans and nature in the short or long term are the subject of controversial debate. Today, it can't be ruled out that genetically modified food will have negative effects. It is therefore not surprising that in Europe in particular, genetically modified seeds and foods are viewed extremely critically. Consequently, there are calls for research into genetic engineering to be controlled to the highest degree, if not banned.

The picture is different for countries most affected by climate change and the resulting heat and water shortages. Seeds are already being developed for dry and hot climates to plant crops there - something that was not possible before. Millions of people can be helped in this way. Instead of dying of malnutrition or being forced to leave their own country, they can feed themselves under their own steam.¹¹

Neurotechnology

Neurotechnology is helping us to better understand our brains and thus our consciousness, behaviors and moods. Diseases and brain damage can be treated more effectively, and we can find out how to strengthen the performance of our brain. The findings can be applied in many fields. For example, we can better understand decision-making. This, in turn, can help develop pathways for personalized learning. Insights into the complexity and intricate interconnectedness in the brain can also be applied to fields such as architecture, computers, or organizational models.

3D and 4D printing

3D printers have already made their way into industrial manufacturing, are constantly being improved and can lead to disruptive change there. 4D printing involves smart materials that “move and/or change under a specific sensory trigger, such as contact with water, heat, vibration, or sound. 4D printing is at an early stage of development and combines several sciences such as bioengineering,

materials science and engineering, chemistry and computer science, and engineering”¹².

While 3D and 4D printers are mainly used in industry, it is only a matter of time before they become usable for the masses as well. Both variants allow consumers to print products at home, removing the need to purchase them from other sources. The impact on supply chains and trade is likely to be immense.

Virtual and Augmented Realty

Virtual reality, which can be experienced by means of specially manufactured glasses, as well as augmented reality, help with idea generation, training, collaboration and the exchange of experiences. These technologies are already being used in product design and development, saving time and money and opening up new creative spaces. Simulators for training purposes have been used for years. The development in the entertainment and games industry is even more rapid. In movies, virtual and augmented realities are increasingly merging, enabling special effects in cinema and television that were unimaginable just a few years ago. The same applies to the gaming industry, which is exploding worldwide. Whereas at the turn of the millennium, computer games were still geared toward one’s own computer and perhaps the one next door, e-sports events now fill soccer stadiums. Players around the world are finding and networking with each other and arranging to play in the virtual world. Meanwhile, more and more schools and universities are thinking about or have already integrated gaming in the broader sense - keyword “gamification” - as well as virtual and augmented realities into their curriculum and operations. Not only do physical boundaries disappear, but opportunities arise to reach and engage a seemingly unlimited number of people.

The downside of virtual and augmented realities is obvious: living in artificial worlds increases the risk of losing touch with analog reality.

Alternative energies

Renewable energy is cleaner, more efficient and more environmentally friendly than traditional energy. There is research exploring whether environmental damage can

even be reversed. This requires that research, business and government work together to unleash the potential for this. Only, as great as the promise and positive impact of alternative energy is, it is questionable how quickly progress will be made here, considering that the energy industry is controlled and regulated by a few large corporations. Progress in alternative energy tends to be slowed or even prevented because it could jeopardize the profits of these companies. Whether and when this will change is an open question.

Trusted transactions thanks to blockchain

“What the internet did for communications, blockchain will do for trusted transactions. [...] in short, it has the power to streamline processes and eliminate abuse.”¹³ This is about much more than processes, but the development of a decentralized accounting system of the future. This is likely to have far-reaching implications for our economic lives. Some are even talking about a revolution for money, the economy and the whole world.¹⁴

“A blockchain is a continuously expandable list of records, called ‘blocks,’ that are chained together using cryptographic techniques.” This is used in particular in decentralized accounting, in which “the correct state in each case must be documented because many participants are involved in the accounting. What is to be documented is irrelevant to the notion of blockchain. What matters is that later transactions build on earlier transactions and confirm them as correct by proving knowledge of the earlier transactions. This makes it impossible to tamper with or erase the existence or content of the earlier transactions without simultaneously destroying all later transactions as well. Other participants in the decentralized ledger who still have knowledge of the later transactions would recognize a tampered copy of the blockchain by the fact that it has inconsistencies in its calculations.”¹⁵ In short, blockchain creates both transparency and trustworthiness in almost all business transactions. Transaction costs are significantly reduced.

The whole thing sounds complicated, but the impact on the banking and insurance sectors, for example, and thus on the capital markets and on supply chains, is likely to be serious. Previous intermediaries such as banks and insurance brokers will be eliminated. Data manipulation

is virtually impossible by conventional means. On the other hand, no one can predict whether this will remain the case in the future.

Geoengineering or climate engineering

The aim of geoengineering is to use technology to intervene in the (bio)geochemical cycles of the earth. For example, research is being conducted into how geoengineering can help to get global warming or ocean acidification back under control.¹⁶ To what extent this is actually possible without risking complex and unpredictable or uncontrollable side effects cannot be said with certainty. The risk that possible side effects could lead to even greater problems today casts geoengineering in a dubious light.

Aerospace

Last, but not least, the infinite potential of technologies gives impetus to the dream of finding new living space beyond the earth. Space travel has always been fascinating for us humans. However, the research for our life on earth and the search for new habitats is still very expensive. It can also be abused by politicians and their military fantasies. With the rapid, even exponential development of technology, more and more boundaries are falling. It is only a question of time as to how long it will take before the first tourists orbit the earth in spaceships or travel to the moon - or new valuable raw materials are found on meteorites and brought to earth, or new habitats are discovered or developed in space.

The networked world

Digitization has led to humanity and the economy being more networked today than ever before. This applies both to our private daily lives (thanks to social media) and to the networking of flows of goods and services. Traditional boundaries are disappearing. The world is becoming a single marketplace and economic space. You might think we are all connected and more social. Only, are we really? It's true that we are technically connected and intertwined. But that doesn't mean we've also become more social. There's still a big difference between sharing WhatsApp messages and having a face-to-face conversation. In other words, increasing and better connectivity does not equate to increasing and better social relationships and exchanges.

Limits of traditional capitalism

For the economy—the movement of goods and services—networking has obvious advantages. Markets can expand almost without containment. It is necessary to produce more efficiently and effectively and to get the goods to the consumers. Free market development helps increase prosperity and product diversity. The bottom line, and in purely statistical terms, is that the world's population benefits from this neo-capitalism.

On the other hand, this progress is increasingly at the expense of the environment and a social balance. “Capitalism levels all traditional and emotional values, measuring everything to a single, traditional value: money.”¹⁷ Admittedly, there are different manifestations of capitalism among the regions and countries of the world. If, for example, a form of neo-capitalism was and is propagated in the USA, the social market economy has a long tradition in Germany.

Regardless of this, the common denominator is that the economic system dominates, and man plays only a subordinate role. The U.S. American Frederick Winslow Taylor wrote about this in 1911: “In the past, man has been first. In future, the system must be first.”¹⁸ This principle has prevailed in most industries and organizations over the decades and is still ubiquitous today. Companies are planned, developed and maintained like machines. People are important in this, but primarily as a resource. The decisive factor is that companies and thus economic activity can be planned. This worked well as long as economic processes could be planned and predicted. With the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution, this has changed. Technical, economic and social change is picking up speed, is no longer as easy to understand (let alone predict) as before, and is becoming more complex. Consumers are better informed thanks to the Internet and have ever greater influence on companies.

Digitalization is also transforming the economy. Many companies are learning to react and act more flexibly. Some are faster than others in doing so. Former startups like Airbnb, Uber, Amazon, Facebook and others have overtaken many companies in terms of reach and influence within just a few years. However, this does not mean a departure from Taylorism¹⁹, which is primarily

concerned with maximizing profits and continues to treat people as a resource.

Traditional capitalism does not solve today's problems in the economy, society and the world. It exacerbates them. It rewards those who seek short-term gains and maximize profits, whether or not the business generates value for customers, workers, businesses or society. This capitalism treats people and the environment as resources, cost factors, and numbers on balance sheets. It thrives in an atmosphere of distrust, tension, cut-throat and winning, selfishness and fear. The exploitation or pollution of the environment is considered collateral damage. The division and widening of the gap between rich and poor are dismissed as a distraction that can be remedied by the free market.

Proponents of traditional capitalism, such as former U.S. President Donald Trump, do not deny the fact that the world is becoming increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. But they are not really concerned about it, because they believe that established business principles, processes and rules can also cope with these challenges in the medium and long term. And if there is a problem, it is probably because some people, organizations or governments have disregarded these established principles.

This is not another attack on former US President Trump. In fact, I don't care much about him. What I care about are the implications of his policies, his ideology, his worldview, his decisions, his moods, and sometimes his tweets. And yet, it's not about Trump as a person. For example, former President Obama rightly noted that Trump is not the cause but a symptom of a host of things that are in turmoil in the economy, society, and the world today.²⁰ And indeed, Trump was a potent and excellent symbol of old-time capitalism. The problem is that we no longer live in the 19th or 20th century, which were heavily influenced by the traditional capitalism that Trump loved so much.

I am not a critic of capitalism per se. How could I be, having been a student of neoclassical economics? The fact is that traditional capitalism leads to a dead end. It has inadequate or no answers for today's challenges, it widens the gap between rich and poor, it ensures the exploitation and destruction of our environment and thus our planet. Welcome to the VUCA world of the digital age.

Welcome to the VUCA world

When I talk about the digital world, I always also talk about the “VUCA world”. VUCA is an acronym and stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

The term originated from the U.S. Army War College in the 1990s and was initially used to describe the multi-lateral world after the end of the Cold War.²¹ More generally, VUCA describes difficult framework conditions, for example those of the digital world. For it is indeed volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Thus, if we want to understand the digital world, we cannot avoid the VUCA term. Let’s take a closer look at the individual parts of the term with regard to the digital world:

V = Volatility

The digital world stands for dynamic and rapid change. What is modern and all the rage today may be overtaken by technology tomorrow.

I remember my first laptop, which I purchased in 1996. It had, believe it or not, a hard disk of 500 MB. At that time, this was huge, and it was enough to write my dissertation with it, to do research or to surf the Internet using a separate modem. About half a year later, two successor models of the laptop came on the market. One still had the medium sized hard disk with 500 MB, the other and much more expensive model was already equipped with 1 GB. I wondered at the time who needed so much storage space. For me it was unimaginable. The fact that my computer regularly froze was nothing special. It was annoying, but you got used to it and accepted the somewhat imperfect technology.

Twenty years later, computers have not only become faster, they also have larger storage capacities, which are unlimited thanks to storage in the cloud and can be added terabyte by terabyte.

The development of smart phones is progressing similarly, and there are many other examples of the rapid and ever-faster pace of technological change. There seems to be no limit in sight.

U = Uncertainty

It is not certain where change is headed. What is certain, is the uncertainty about the dynamics of change. The profound changes in our living and working conditions that we humans have been confronted with more and more in recent years bring with them one thing above all: uncertainty. Gone are the days when technological developments could be predicted or believed to be predicted in years or decades. Sometimes they were pretty accurate—as with Kennedy’s promise at the beginning of the 1960s to put a man on the moon and bring them back safely by the end of the decade—but with other developments, such as the MP3 player, developments outstripped predictions. What we can expect with certainty today are many, many surprises - whether in the technical, social and political world or in the environment. Whether we will like it and have the right answers to it is another question. The fact is that uncertainty will increase in the digital world.

C = complexity

Volatility and uncertainty are joined by the growing complexity of the digital world. Things and people are increasingly networked with one another, and it is almost impossible to simply track the interconnections, especially since networking does not stop. Finding simple cause-and-effect chains is becoming more difficult. Instead, there tends to be confusion about where to start, let alone stop, in trying to understand the digital world.

Examples of questions and complex problems include the following:

- How can long-term goals be pursued when we live in a short-term oriented economy?
- How can loyalties and commitments be maintained in institutions that are constantly breaking or being restructured?
- How do we determine what is of lasting value in us when we live in an impatient society that focuses only on the immediate moment?

In connection with the concept of complexity, reference is sometimes made to the Cynefin Framework (/ka'nevɪn/kuh-NEV-in).²² This concept, developed by Dave Snowden in 1999, is used in decision making and other applications. It delineates the terms "simple," "complicated," "complex," and "chaotic" from one another and explains their interrelationship.

A relationship is **simple** if it can be described clearly and precisely and thus understood without any room for interpretation. The relationship between cause and effect is obvious to everyone. Good practices or patent recipes (best practice) are known from comparable cases and can be transferred. The approach here is: Recognize - Categorize - React. As an example, consider the mass production of screws.

A context is **complicated** when the scope for interpretation becomes larger. There are many boundary conditions and dependencies to consider. To understand them, a precise but still feasible and often logical analysis and conclusion is required.

Relationships between cause and effect exist, but you need expert or technical knowledge to recognize them. One should proceed according to the sequence Recognize - Analyze - React. The desired results are obvious or good practices or expert answers, which, however, always leave room for surprises and deviations. An example of a complicated activity is the work of air traffic controllers or the assembly of an aircraft engine.

In **complex** contexts, boundary conditions continue to increase but change constantly, so that connections between contexts can rarely, if ever, be traced logically and consistently. Relationships between cause and effect exist but can only be perceived in retrospect.

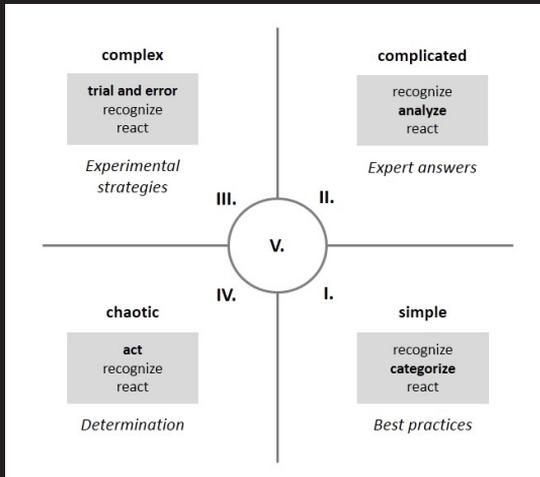
Analyses from complicated environments are replaced by trials. The great unknown remains intangible in all its details. Orientation to proven practices, be they best or good practices, is no longer possible. Rather, experimental strategies and practices develop in the activity itself. We therefore speak of emergent, i.e., evolving, practices. Functioning instructions for action emerge through Trial and Error - Recognition - Reaction.

An example of complexity is the production of mayonnaise. Because of the chemical compounds and reactions, mayonnaise is more than the sum of its parts - unlike, for example, an aircraft engine, which can be disassembled into its individual parts and is therefore complicated, but not complex.

At the end of the spectrum is **chaos, which can** no longer be comprehended at all with ordinary methods. Trial and error or experiments in laboratory environments are not enough. There remains the step into the dark, into the unknown with uncertain outcome. Relationships between cause and effect exist but cannot be identified. If you want to survive here, you have to have the courage to try something new, regardless of whether it succeeds or not. One has no idea of the outcome anyway. There is no relationship between cause and effect for the whole, nor is there any orientation to best practices. The recommendation for action is: Act - Recognize - React. The goal is to discover innovative practices (Novel Practice) in the process. In a sense, this is a paradise for hara-kiri pioneers who plunge into an unknown depth. Courage and determination can be rewarded, but it doesn't have to be.

A fifth area would be **disorder**, where one does not know if there is any kind of causality at all. Here, tasks and problems are classified about which one knows too little to be able to assign them to another subarea.

Graphically, the Cynefin framework can be summarized as follows:



If one tries to tackle complex or even chaotic relationships with simple means, it cannot work. The simple means are swallowed rather like by a black hole without any residue remaining. In other words, trying to understand and manage complicated, complex or chaotic contexts with simple approaches and templates is doomed to failure.

A = Ambiguity

The final element of the VUCA concept is ambiguity. It is no longer possible to clarify or interpret situations unambiguously. In contrast to uncertainty, where there is insufficient information for explanation and interpretation, in ambiguity there is sufficient relevant information. However, one cannot develop an unambiguous explanation based on this information. As a result, misinterpretations can occur. Instead of being able to clearly work out causes and effects, confusion and disorientation prevail. It is as if a severely myopic person has to walk through the world without glasses.

VUCA - Reality Check

VUCA is not really new. Quite honestly, we have always been dealing with change. What is different today is the speed and its own dynamics of change. We must not forget that we humans ourselves have driven this change with technology. It always has to be faster, more efficient, better. If we call digitization a demon - well, we ourselves created it and continue to feed it diligently.

In 2007, the first iPhone came onto the market. Back then, smartphones were still something very special. Today, even elementary school children have their own smartphones. According to the BKK Health Report 2017, more than half of all employees in Germany today use digital technology such as smartphones or computers on a daily basis.²³ TVs with Internet access are just as non-exotic as 3D printers, although the latter are perhaps still rather rare in private households. In industry, 3D printers are often part of the normal inventory. Digitalization, driven by automation, has permanently changed the manufacturing industry. In addition to robots, cognitive technologies for speech recognition and processing and machines with artificial intelligence are occupying an ever-larger area.²⁴ The trend is clearly toward further automation. As a result, routine jobs are falling victim to the machines. It is therefore hardly surprising that 38% of employees see the risk of jobs disappearing due to automation. Only 18% see digitization as a job generator.

The rapid development of technology has a significant impact on companies and thus the entire economy. The life cycles for products and services are becoming shorter and shorter. Thanks to the Internet, consumers have more information than ever before about products and services. Their direct influence on companies is thus increasing. The market is developing into a buyer's market. The same applies to the labor market, where there is a war for talent in countries with high employment. The fact that not every company can cope with this change is reflected in the falling life expectancy of companies, which has dropped from 15 to 5 years in recent years.²⁵

Today's economic model is strongly influenced by the so-called Tayloristic approach. This approach describes and treats companies as machines that can be planned and controlled. Workers play an important role here in that they are valuable resources in this machinery. Of course, this model has evolved since industrialization. At its core, it had endured over the years. It's all about increasing efficiency and maximizing profits.

As a trained economist, I would be the last person to question this across the board. The fact is that the Tayloristic approach has contributed significantly to economic and entrepreneurial development. To claim that Taylorism was wrong is not only too simplistic, but simply wrong. It is a child of the times and of the understanding at that time of business and the place of people in it. In times when economic, social and political change was rather leisurely and manageable compared to today, this approach made perfect sense and served mankind well. It worked well as long as the change was reasonably predictable, and the connections were still comprehensible and supported by the masses. There were problems during those times whenever there were unforeseen changes, just as there are problems today whenever there are unforeseen changes. If they were still of a simple nature, it was possible to find and implement answers to the new challenges relatively quickly.

With digitization, however, we are seeing changes that break the old patterns. The market has changed, become more networked, and at the same time more sensitive to fluctuations. Thanks to the Internet, today's customers are better informed than they have ever been and are no longer dependent on individual offers that are presented to them. They have infinite choices. It is not so much companies that steer and determine what is on offer, but customers. Companies that don't understand this are losing customers fast.

In the companies themselves, there is a struggle for the best talent. At the same time, the level of sickness in companies has been increasing in recent years. The human resource can be used less and less than before.

Last but not least, it shows that the isolated focus on short-term profits (EBIT) actually leads to the destruction rather than the increase of capital and thus market power.²⁶

In short, traditionally managed companies, when caught up in the digital VUCA wave, reach their limits and are pushed to the wall. Old tools such as process optimization or innovation planning remain blunt and can at best provide short-term relief. They no longer contribute sustainably to survival and success in the digital age.

Our dilemma is that we are too often trapped in the past, frantically clinging to traditions that may have already become obsolete and no longer fit for the times. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sums up the dilemma when she says, “We face the task of understanding and governing 21st century technologies with a 20th-century mindset and 19th-century institutions.”²⁷

This is not a call to end capitalism - that would be too simple. And it would be plain stupid. Capitalism is still a core element of economic activity that we humans need to survive and thrive. What we do need, however, is develop a new orientation for a sustainable design of our world - be it in companies, in life or in work. It's not just a matter of throwing the tried and true overboard. We need guidelines for finding solutions to today's problems and at the same time doing business sustainably in the 21st century. What we need are new principles for doing business in the 21st century that simultaneously build bridges that any company can cross to create a sustainable future. One such model - Human Business - is the focus of this book.

The rediscovery of the human being

In contrast to traditional business, Human Business no longer focuses on the company, but on us as humans. We are no longer resources or weak-willed consumers but are seen and treated as human beings. The goals of Human Business are to inspire customers and to create a working environment that is characterized by trust and respect, thus enabling peak human performance without exploiting employees. At the same time, Human Business always keeps an eye on the economic fundamentals, i.e., the short-, medium- and long-term value creation of the company. The aim is to operate sustainably and to constantly develop and improve, for the benefit of customers, employees, the company itself and the environment, i.e., society and nature.

Human Business thus takes a more holistic approach than traditional business. The latter focuses on the company itself: people work for the company. They are a means to an end. In contrast, in Human Business we work for people both inside and outside the company - be it for customers, employees or society. Human Business is not a machine like the traditional company, but a human and economic network.

Yet, as different as traditional companies are from Human Business, it is not impossible that they can transform. Digitization and the VUCA world are pushing traditional companies to the edge of their capabilities. If they want to survive, they will inevitably have to open themselves up to transformation and actively tackle it. This will not happen overnight and will require a great deal of effort and discipline. We can describe this metaphorically as the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

Metamorphosis from traditional to Human Business



	Traditional Business	Transformation	Human Business
Values Focus	Enterprise	Customer	Human
	Survival, relationship, self-esteem	Transformation, courage for development and growth	Internal cohesion, service, making a difference
Objectives & Practices	Developing and selling products and services, safety, financial stability, maximizing shareholder value, loyalty, efficient systems and processes, best practices; control, bureaucracy, manipulation, self-satisfaction, blaming	Delighting customers, continuous learning and self-improvement, accountability, alignment, empowerment, teamwork, results orientation.	Delighting customers, sustainable business balancing short, medium and long term results, building employee community, shared values and vision, integrity, openness, transparency, strategic partnerships, fulfillment for employees, mentoring, service to the common good, long term perspective, ethics, compassion, humility.

Metamorphosis from traditional company to Human Business (Image: ©JPS, Adobe Stock)²⁸

This book contains what is needed to enable and shape this metamorphosis. In doing so, we will look at and discuss both the values and goals of Human Business as well as the practice and transformation towards Human Business.

What does the book want?

The book presents Human Business as a design tool for life and work in the digital age. In doing so, it puts humans at the center throughout. From the very beginning, you as the reader are put at the helm of the digital transformation - you don't have to let digitization push you around and you're not just forced to react.

The book shows how important it is to ask the right questions to shape today and tomorrow. Instead of asking what the future will look like, we use the questions "How do we want to live?" and "What makes our lives more worth living?" for our design mission. It is thus a shift from reacting passively and fearfully to change in the digital age to actively, responsibly and optimistically shaping it. These are questions that express the optimism of wanting and shaping.²⁹

The book explains how we can move from the passive role of human resource to rediscovering humanity and thus actively shaping our future. This enables us to enrich our lives individually as well as to shape our environment sustainably - be it in our life or work.

This is how the book is structured: We look at the essence of Human Business in Part 1. In Part 2, we learn how to rediscover our human essence and creative potential to shape our lives. We bring the insights from these two parts together in Part 3, which looks at how to design work. Finally, in Part 4, we look at what can help us metamorphose from traditional to Human Business.

Interviews

Throughout the book, I let several fellow individuals who are already actively shaping the future today and thus inspiring others share their insights and experiences. In Chapter 3, “Human Business in Practice,” I let the co-founder and CEO of a Human Business share his insights. Bestselling author Richard Sheridan describes how he and his team turned Menlo Innovation into a place full of joy.

In Chapter 7, “Playing,” adventure journalist and photographer Malte Clavin talks about the magic of the moment and how curiosity and openness shape his profession and make a lasting contribution to learning success.

In Chapter 9 “Key to Being Human: Gratitude,” mindfulness coach and happiness teacher Dirk Gemein explains the connection between change, happiness, and gratitude.

In Chapter 10, “Dancing Life,” Tango Maestro Horacio Godoy and Maestra Cecilia Berra, as well as dance teacher Isabella Bayer, share their insights and experiences. They illustrate what we can learn about life from Tango.

In Chapter 14, “The Golden Rule for the Digital Age,” Reboot the Future Foundation co-founder Kim Polman discusses how the Golden Rule can help us shape the future by working together.

Management thought leader Steve Denning shares his observation in Chapter 15, “Agile Door Openers,” that in the emerging Agile era, momentum is focused on people who bring joy to others.

Finally, in Chapter 16, “Leadership for Change,” leadership coach Julia von Winterfeldt explains the difference that meaning-driven leadership makes for people as well as for the company.

What the book is and what it is not

The Spirit of Human Business is not intended to lecture. It provokes us to critically question old ways of thinking and practices. At the same time, it encourages people to reflect on their own human core, to discover their own creativity and innovation potential and to use it in a playful yet focused way to shape the future.

The book references many sources from thought leaders. However, it is not a theoretical treatise on the subject. It is based on practical life experiences and insights and offers pragmatic suggestions for personal deepening and application of the contents.

Last but not least, *The Spirit of Human Business* is not a maneuver critique of technological change or capitalism. It demonizes neither the one nor the other. The book addresses the risks, but also the opportunities, of digitization. The discussion of which is more serious is not part of the book. We first must find answers to the question of how we want to live. But we will not find answers to this question in digitization. Instead, we have to start the search and answer the question for ourselves. Digitization can help us do this. But not as a dictate or orientation, but as a tool. And to be able to use digitization as a tool, we first must learn to be human again and develop ideas about how we want to live. Then and only then will all doors be open to us.



Part 1:
Discovering Human Business

In Part 1, we look at what course we can set to shape business in the digital age. The goal is to find out how we can unleash our human potential in business. For the benefit and added value of customers, employees and the company itself as well as its environment.

Chapter 2 contrasts traditional companies with Human Business and outlines their most significant differences. In addition, it identifies commonalities that help build bridges for the future that traditional companies can cross, if they choose to.

In Chapter 3, we shed light on where the values and principles of Human Business are already being lived. We begin with an interview with Richard Sheridan, the co-founder and CEO of Menlo Innovations, a software company in the USA. What is so special about this Human Business is that it has made joy, trust and humanity the drivers of its business. Every year, several thousand people from all over the world visit this company to observe its special working atmosphere and spirit and to be inspired. After this interview, we look at environments where Human Business can thrive or is already lived today. This is, for example, the German Mittelstand and social businesses. We also look at the concepts of corporate social responsibility and Deloitte's social enterprise approach.

2. Tradition Meets Modernity

“In the history of mankind, culture served life and technology served survival.

Today, technology determines our lives, but which culture ensures our survival?”

Richard David Precht,
German philosopher and futurologist

Key points

- Traditional capitalism does not solve today’s problems in the economy, society and the world. Companies that primarily pursue short-term goals and disregard long-term perspectives risk their own future.
What we need are new principles for doing business in the 21st century. The principles of Human Business fill this gap. It differs significantly from the classic business paradigm. And yet, it also builds bridges that any company can cross to build a sustainable future.
- Human Business values and focuses on
 1. delighting its customers,
 2. offering its own employees a humane and thus creative work and design environment,
 3. ensuring the sustainable value creation for business and
 4. constantly reflecting and self-improving itself.
- Human Business cannot be planned on a white board. It requires openness, curiosity, and a dialogue throughout the entire organization.

The traditional corporate world and economy

Characteristics of traditional business

The essence of the traditional 20th century enterprise is that it can be planned and managed like a machine. It's a great engineering feat, so to speak, though I mean that in anything but a derogatory way. The focus is on the enterprise. The purpose is to produce the best products and services and bring them to market. What is manufactured is primarily a decision of the company, the vendor. That's why we talk about a "seller's market."

The structure and organization of the traditional company are characterized by efficiency. The goal is to make the processes in the company as elegant as possible. This can best be achieved through well-planned linear organizational charts and clear hierarchies. Matrix organizations are conceivable, too. Uncertainties or risks in the business process or in the market are controlled by detailed planning, so that management can make clear, predictable and correct decisions for the good of the company. Communication is top-down, so that all employees have the necessary knowledge to work productively. The fact that not all employees can fully identify with the company is accepted. The key is to ensure an optimal allocation of resources and to find the best employees for the company's goals.

Innovation is a driving factor for the success of the company. Here, the focus is on rapid, incremental product and process innovations that help reduce costs and maximize the company's profits. This particularly rewards the company's backers, the shareholders, who show great interest in positive quarterly results because this usually has a positive impact on share prices.

The following table summarizes the guiding leadership and management principles of the 20th century³⁰:

20th century - the company as a machine

Center	Company
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Production and sale of products and services• Functionality and product orientation
Workplace, organization	<p>Company as a machine (Tayloristic approach)</p> <p>Linear organizational charts, top-down and/or matrix organization, human as resource, machine is more important/valuable than human</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work structure: bureaucracy and hierarchy• Organization: planning and control• Transparency: what it takes to get work done• Communication: top-down, micromanagement• Impact on workforce: Up to 30% and more have already quit internally and are actively working against their company and colleagues.
Innovation	Planning for and focus on rapid, incremental product and process innovation, driven by cost reduction and profit maximization
Results	Focus on short-term profits, rising share prices and stock market value

Characteristics of a traditional company

Expressions of the traditional world

The description of a traditional company may be exaggerated or simplified in parts. And yet it is an apt description of many companies, especially in the U.S. market, which is characterized by traditional capitalism like hardly any other. This was intensified under Trump's presidency. Trump's economic policies were fundamentally different from his predecessors and diverged from mainstream economic and political thinking. Take, for example, his massive tax cuts for the corporate world or his initiated trade wars. Looking at the economic numbers and the booming stock market a short time after tax reform, his policies seemed to be paying off and ushering in a new era of economic prosperity. But was this really the case?

Long-term market performance indices and forecasts tell a different story. Share buybacks do not help build a solid foundation for future business success. They provide short-term benefits. But for how long? Where does it lead? Has big money won and overtaken progressive economic and political thinking? How sustainable is this short-term growth? Who benefits, who loses? And last but not least: What are the answers to today's global challenges, which are increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous? What if Trump's preferred form of capitalism paved the path to a dead end?

Maximizing shareholder value: engine for growth?

“There is only one responsibility of the company: to use its resources and participate in activities aimed at increasing its profit, as long as the rules of the game are respected.”

Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

There is no doubt that Milton Friedman and the shareholder value theory have shaped Western business since the 1970s. This has led to the enormous prosperity of companies and societies, even if the fruits of this growth have not been distributed equally.

And Friedman, as Steve Denning points out in a *Forbes* article³¹, is still very much alive. He explains, “In 1990, an article in *HBR* by Michael Jensen and Kevin Murphy³², gave shareholder value thinking a new push. The article, “CEO Incentives—It’s Not How Much You Pay, But How” suggested that CEOs were being paid like bureaucrats. Instead, they should be paid with significant amounts of stock so that their interests would be aligned with stockholders. Thereafter, the use of the phrase ‘maximize shareholder value’ exploded and CEOs became very entrepreneurial — but in *their own cause*, not necessarily their firm’s cause.”

Denning goes on to explain that “by 2017, shareholder value thinking was everywhere. Joseph Bower and Lynn S. Paine reported in *Harvard Business Review*³³ that shareholder value thinking “is now pervasive in the financial community and much of the business world.” It had led to a set of behaviors by many actors on a wide range of topics, “from performance measurement and executive compensation to shareholder rights, the role of directors, and corporate responsibility.”

Acknowledging shareholder value thinking is common in today’s business world and a booming stock market. What’s so wrong with that? Why change a profit formula?

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, has been called one of the proponents of maximizing shareholder value. Since leaving GE, however, he preached just the opposite: “Shareholder value [is] the dumbest idea in the world.” Welch also pointed out several times that shareholder value is an outcome, not a goal.

So far, so good. But what about business development on the market?

According to the 2016 Shift Index³⁴ from the *Deloitte Center for the Edge*, there is conclusive evidence of the failure of traditional management:

- Corporate ROI in the U.S. has declined 75% since 1965, from 4.7% in 1965 to 1.3% in 2015.
- The life expectancy of Fortune 500 companies has dropped to 15 years and is moving toward a life expectancy of only 5 years in the medium term.
- Only one in three employees is truly engaged in their work.

It may be laudable to maintain the performance of a status quo. But that does not ensure a lasting, sustainable business. In fact, the opposite is true. Renowned economist Mariana Mazzucato³⁵ explains that “shareholder value theory - the destructive idea that companies should be run solely for the benefit of shareholders - has led to financialized businesses that do not invest in the areas that will lead to future growth or the invention of useful new products.”³⁶

In short, traditional companies infiltrated by shareholder value theory not only ignore long-term perspectives, but also risk their own future existence. This is nothing other than short-sighted business management.

Stuck in the past

But why then do so many companies still cling to a business paradigm of the past? Well, there are at least two reasons:

1. It is convenient

Corporate governance in most companies is still based on the old business paradigm, along with a complicated incentive system for individual and corporate stock market performance. Changing these processes and cultures takes forever. Why change it, especially since those who would have to make a personal effort to change are benefiting from the old system?

Linking maximizing shareholder value to personal compensation blinds managers to the real world - and most of them don't even realize it because they were born blind in early childhood (or education) or have lost their sight over time. From this perspective, they are living out their DNA. I don't think you can even blame them for their education that shaped their belief system. They were indoctrinated.

As long as this incentive system does not change, we should not expect any fundamental change in the leadership and management of traditional companies. This will not change despite the influential Business Roundtable in the USA in August 2019 announcing a departure from the principle of maximizing shareholder value.³⁷ Talk is one thing - following up words with action is something else.

2. No alternatives are seen

A second reason for favoring existing belief systems is that proponents of the status quo simply see no real alternative. Thinking only in terms of processes only leads to generating new, possibly even more complicated processes. There is simply no time to look at new ideas that improve existing processes.

Organizational pathology of learning

Organizational researcher Otto Scharmer (2009)³⁸ lists six characteristics of organizations that are trapped in the past and closed to active learning and change:

1. **Institutional or organizational ignorance:** not seeing what is happening
2. **Institutional arrogance:** no capacity for perception, reflection or dialogue
3. **Institutional absencing:** not knowing their authentic self; inflated self-image; image out of sync with reality, resulting in a deeply rooted inability to recognize what is going on
4. **Institutional disinformation and anomie:** not serving the whole; self-absorbed
5. **Institutional sclerosis:** lack of experimentation and renewal capacity - strategic shifts and significant innovations not available
6. **Lack of infrastructure/corporate collapse:** no focus on actual performance; destruction of structure.

As long as these established considerations hold, it is difficult to change anything - until it is too late. Yet change is not that complicated. Let's look at the opposite of the traditional business paradigm of short-term profits and shareholder value theory. It's the purpose-driven economics of Human Business.

Human Business: a new corporate and economic culture

Characteristics

In contrast to the traditional corporate world, the focus is not on the company as such, but on people: be it the customer, who wants to be delighted, the employee, who is treated with trust and respect, or the environment - that is, both society and nature, which benefit from the sustainable management of a Human Business. This is also reflected in the purpose of a Human Business: It is the holistic creation of value for customers, employees, companies and their environment.

This may sound illusory or fantastic, but it is not in any way. Generating added value for customers means not just satisfying them, but delighting them - for example, by delivering the highest quality products and services or by ensuring a fast “time to market”. “Time to market” is, after all, nothing other than the speed at which companies can bring products and services to market to meet demand.

Generating added value for employees means treating them with trust and respect and creating an environment in which they can unfold their potential. This is rewarded by extraordinary team performance, but not for the purpose of exploiting employees, but as a result of joint, purpose-oriented action. In contrast to traditional business, whose work organization is characterized by hierarchy and bureaucracy, in Human Business we find small, interdisciplinary teams that can organize themselves and even be autonomous. They adapt to the requirements of the company or the market, networking with each other to enable the greatest possible synergy effects within and between the teams. The work is oriented, as it were, towards creating value for customers, employees, the company and the environment. One does not follow a “grand plan” but delivers added value to customers iteratively and incrementally.

That is why open and transparent communication is necessary in the company. It does not take place from the top down, but through interactive dialog. It is obvious that

employees feel more comfortable in such a working environment, which we can easily call a “happy workplace,” than in a traditional environment. This in turn has a positive impact on employee productivity and the quality delivered. In other words, customers and companies also benefit from a “Happy Workplace”.

That is why it is also in the interest of a Human Business to continuously invest in employee and leadership development. This investment is no less important than innovation in products and processes. A Human Business understands that products and processes alone do not “innovate” - it is the people who innovate. We refer to this as “people innovation.”⁹⁹ Thus, a Human Business takes a holistic approach to innovation of people, products and processes.

Last but not least, “value creation” for a Human Business means that it is able to achieve short-, medium- and long-term results in harmony with and in responsibility for its environment. It is not only the company that benefits, but also its environment - be it society or nature. This does not mean a reduction in corporate profits, but rather a sustainable safeguarding of economic activity, which incidentally also has a positive effect on investors. However, the maximization of shareholder interests, shareholder value, is not the driver of Human Business, but rather the result of people-oriented, purpose-driven, far-sighted action.

The following table summarizes the essential characteristics of a Human Business:

21st century - enterprise as a human network

Center	Humans
Purpose	Holistic value creation for customers, employees, the company and the environment
Workplace, organization	<p>Human design and workspace, characterized by trust and respect ("Happy Workplace")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small, multidisciplinary teams; ideally: autonomous, self-organizing teams; organically grown structures, dynamic, fluid <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work structure: autonomous teams• Organization: customer-driven iterations• Transparency: radical transparency, open communication• Communication: interactive dialogue• Impact on employees: high productivity, continuous innovation <p>Concrete effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employee satisfaction• friendly, healthy and safe working environment• Investment in employee and leadership development
Innovation	Continuous and holistic improvement of: products, processes and employees
Results	<p>Value creation: holistic, sustainable economic benefit</p> <p>Ensuring a balance of short-, medium- and long-term results and profits</p>

Characteristics of Human Business

Value proposition of Human Business

Despite the increasing challenges in our VUCA world, Human Business welcomes today's demands. It focuses on serving and delighting its customers, employees, businesses, and society. In doing so, Human Business focuses on us as people, as humans. In other words, it is constantly looking for ways and means to offer sustainable added value to customers, employees, businesses, and their environment. From this perspective, Human Business offers four value propositions:

The four value propositions of Human Business

1. We want to delight our customers.
2. We trust, respect and care about our employees.
3. We develop and secure sustainable business value.
4. We are constantly learning and improving ourselves.

Let's elaborate:

1. We want to delight our customers

Customer orientation is not new. Peter Drucker, one of the greatest management thinkers of all time, explains it as follows: "There is only one valid definition of a business purpose: to generate a customer."⁴⁰

Delighting a customer goes far beyond generating a customer and satisfying their needs. Delighting a customer means that a company knows exactly what their needs, expectations and desires are and strives to meet and exceed them. The customer is perceived not just as a consumer, but as a human being with needs. The goal is to win customers for life. The company addresses its customers, communicates with them, "walks in their shoes" and shows sincere interest in them. There are no quick fixes for this approach. It is an attitude and belief system.

2. We trust, respect and care for our employees

Employees are not resources like products. They are humans and want to be treated as such. Peter Drucker demands that a company treat its employees as volunteers. A Human Business understands this and acts accordingly - regardless of gender, creed, or origin. It shows a genuine interest in the needs of its employees. This begins with a safe and environmentally friendly work environment. To ensure that employees follow the company's vision and goals, these are shared with them, and they are involved in developing and shaping them. In this way, they become a part of it.

Seidman (2011) writes, "working with passion is an engine that is unbelievable. A person with drive and passion does three times the job of another person. But it is not so much the quantity of the job; that is not the point. The point is that they draw crowds; they have followers; they push, and lead, and so achieve much more."⁴¹

3. We develop and secure sustainable business value

Shareholder value is not commensurate with a company's value creation, or business value. A company's value creation includes short-, medium- and long-term business practices, interests, and investments. Business value is composed of several factors: overall business performance and prospects, customer satisfaction, market position, innovation performance, workforce skills and turnover, the attractiveness of the company as an employer of choice, and many other factors.

While the daily share price depends heavily on quarterly results, daily events and a relatively short time horizon into the future, business value encompasses more than just quarterly results. Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, explains why it is so important to have a long-term perspective:

"If everything you do needs to work on a three-year time horizon, then you're competing against a lot of people. But if you're willing to invest on a seven-year time horizon, you're now competing against a fraction of those people, because very few companies are willing to do that. Just by lengthening the time horizon, you can engage in endeavors that you could never otherwise pursue. At Amazon we like things to work in five to seven years. We're willing to plant seeds, let them grow—and we're very stubborn. We say we're stubborn on vision and flexible on details."⁴²

Last but not least, business value takes into account not only business figures, but also a company's social responsibility. Klaus Schwab, founder and director of the World Economic Forum, explains in the Davos Manifesto 2020:

“The purpose of a company is to engage all its stakeholders in shared and sustained value creation. In creating such value, a company serves not only its shareholders, but all its stakeholders – employees, customers, suppliers, local communities and society at large. ... A company is more than an economic unit generating wealth. It fulfils human and societal aspirations as part of the broader social system.”⁴³

Klaus Schwab's comprehensive view of business value summarizes what it means when we say that Human Business is holistic and people-centered, focused on creating, sustaining, and building sustainable value for its customers, employees, businesses, and society. It serves as a business compass that helps optimize daily operations⁴⁴ and build and sustain organizational excellence⁴⁵. As such, Human Business is both visionary and pragmatic.

4. We are constantly learning and improving ourselves

A value proposition is not a one-time affair. It is a credo of daily action. In the VUCA world, we must deal with constant changes from outside and inside. There are no fixed predictions of how the future will develop. So, it is essential that we cultivate an active learning culture, openness, and curiosity. Only those who are bold enough and embrace the lightness of the human spirit of play, curiosity and action will excel in the long run in such a dynamic world. In concrete terms, this means reflecting on our achievements as well as setbacks, learning from them and trying to improve and develop ourselves. This does not always have to be huge advancements or innovations. Smaller, incremental changes can also be of great benefit. The important thing is that we are always prepared to learn, to encourage this and to demand it.

It follows from this fourth value proposition that a Human Business is a learning organization. According to Peter Senge (1990), this is⁴⁶ an organization in which

- people continuously expand their capacity to achieve the results they really want,
- new and expansive patterns of thinking are cultivated,
- collective aspiration is released and
- people learn to see the whole together.

Design principles for a Human Business

The following principles for designing a Human Business can be derived from the value propositions:

Ten principles for the design of a Human Business

Purpose of the company

1. Human Business is **holistic and human-centered**, i.e., it focuses on serving and delighting its customers, workforce, business, and society.
2. the purpose of Human Business is to generate **sustainable added value** for its customers, employees, enterprises and their environment.

Collaboration

3. Human Business promotes **diversity, gender equality, openness, and inclusion** in the workforce, reflecting an open society.
4. Human Business advocates and promotes **interdisciplinary and self-organizing teams**.

Performance

5. Human Business **trusts, respects and treats employees as human beings** whose creativity and potential can be unfolded. It promotes employee and leadership development and practices employee empowerment.
6. Human Business understands **joy as a driver of business and daily work**.

Learning and innovation

7. Human Business cultivates **open and learning organizations** that embrace change and are committed to continuous improvement of products and services, processes, and people.
8. Human Business offers and **shares guidelines** for responses to rapid changes in business and society.

Delivery and results

9. Human Business understands **profits as a means to fulfill its business purpose**, i.e., Human Business is purpose-driven, not profit-driven.
10. Human Business advocates a **circular economy** in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life.⁴⁷

Together with the four value propositions of Human Business, these ten principles serve as a guideline for sustainable and Human Business in the 21st century.

Over the course of the book, we will return to these design principles again and again and discuss them further. In doing so, it is important not to throw the tried and true and still valuable overboard, but to build bridges to the future. The digital age offers us the unique opportunity to no longer understand, lead and manage the company as a machine, but as a human, i.e., dynamic, changing and complex network. This is not so much a new construct as a recognition of reality and the adaptation of corporate concepts to the new realities.

Comparison of two worlds

Let us contrast the characteristics of the old and new worlds once again:

	20th century - Business as a machine	21st century - enterprise as a human network
Focus	Company	Humans
Purpose	Production and sale of products and services Features, product orientation	Holistic value creation for customers, employees, the company and the environment
Workplace, organization	Linear organization charts, top-down and/ or matrix organization, human as resource, machine - human, company as machine (Tayloristic approach)	Human design and work space, characterized by trust and respect ("Happy Workplace") Small, multidisciplinary teams; ideally: autonomous, self-organizing teams; organically grown structures, dynamic, fluid
Innovation	Planning, focus on rapid, incremental product and process innovation, driven by cost reduction and profit maximization	Continuous and holistic improvement of: people, products, and processes
Results	Focus on short-term profits, rising share prices and stock market value	Holistic and sustainable value creation and benefits for customers, employees, business, and society; balance of short-, medium- and long-term goals

Business as a machine vs. business as a human network

It would be presumptuous to claim that all traditional leadership and management principles have had their day. There are still companies and industries that are not exposed to the rapid change of the VUCA world and can still operate in a relatively stable market. But whenever the VUCA world takes over, they reach their limits.

Doing business in the 21st century requires a new orientation to cope with and master the new challenges and the great unknowns. Not all the proven leadership and management principles and practices of the last century (middle column of table) have to be thrown overboard. If they help to master the challenges of the VUCA world, there is not much to be said against their application. However, it is doubtful whether they can serve as an orientation for the future in a VUCA world - especially if they exclude us humans or at best treat us as one of many resources. If they put the brakes on the development of employees' potential and creativity, it is like driving a Ferrari in third gear with the handbrake on. You don't get anywhere fast enough, nor is it particularly fun. So why not release the handbrake? What can you lose?

Winners and losers

Indeed, the question of whether there are winners or losers in the development of Human Business is legitimate. In Human Business, people “win” first and foremost. Be it the customers, the employees or society. The companies win insofar as they pursue sustainable value creation and thus secure their existence. Therefore, it is not only the companies that benefit from sustainable management, but also our environment and, in turn, we humans. The circle closes.

Where there are winners, there are also losers, although the list of losers is relatively short. It includes the supporters of short-term profits, the gamblers on the stock exchanges and the managers who want to exercise and expand power, regardless of whether they oppress and demotivate employees in the process. But honestly, the bottom line is that this is more than justifiable, especially since in the Human Business model the “net benefit” more than makes up for any disadvantages.

The Global Peter Drucker Forum

Within just a few years, the annual “Global Peter Drucker Forum”⁴⁸ has become one of the most important management conferences worldwide. It is often referred to as the “Davos of Management”. Once a year, renowned management thinkers meet in Vienna to discuss and exchange ideas on the latest developments in management. As the name of the conference suggests, the focus is on the teachings of the management thinker Peter Drucker.

Even though Drucker’s teachings are more than 50 years old, they are more relevant today than ever before. In the contributions to the discussion in Vienna, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that traditional management thinking has had its day and that we need to open to new trends. Drucker’s teachings are a good start – but they don’t end there. In 2018, the motto of the conference was “Management. The Human Dimension.” In 2019, the motto was “The Power of Ecosystems: Managing in a Connected World.” In 2020, it’s “Leadership Everywhere. A fresh perspective on management”. And in 2021 the motto is “The Human Imperative: Navigating Uncertainty in the Digital Age”.

Another question, of course, is how long it will take for this opening for modern management thinking to become established at universities and ultimately in companies.⁴⁹As long as the old doctrine of the Tayloristic business is still taught at universities, business schools or HR programs⁵⁰ this could still be a long way off. On the other hand, I believe that the VUCA world will force companies to rethink if they don’t want to go bankrupt. Time will tell.

New orientation for politics, state, and society

Even if we focus on Human Business in this book, it may be interesting to look at the reorientation in politics, the state and society. In particular, the question arises as to whether the characteristics of Human Business can be applied here.

Digitization and the VUCA world that we humans have developed ourselves are having a significant impact on political and social life, just as they are on the economy. With the help of technology, the world is becoming more tight-knit, more networked and more transparent. On the one hand, this has positive effects, but at the same time it increases the risk of small, local, and even global chain reactions.

The VUCA world overwhelms people, organizations, and countries alike. Attempts are made to master and/or control familiar challenges, usually by falling back on old, familiar means, tools, and processes. This ignores the fact that it was and is precisely these means, tools and processes that are partly responsible for today's problems.

Need for orientation

What is required to orient oneself in the VUCA world and to shape it is thinking in new fields as well as courage to leave the old behind and to enter new territory. Together, curiously and without bias.

Analogous to Human Business, there is also an opportunity in politics at the local, regional, national and international levels to focus on people and their social environment and living environment.

In a sense, this is a call to return to the roots of the social market economy. So wrote Ludwig Erhard in 1954:

“I have expressed it again and again that in my view of the social market economy there is only one yardstick, and that is the consumer [...] For what other purpose should an economy have than that of helping the whole of the people to ever better and freer living conditions, of overcoming sorrows, and of making the blessing of freedom [...] available to all?”⁵¹

In his book “Prosperity for All” (1957), Erhard stated⁵²:

“The ideal I have in mind is based on the strength that the individual can say: ‘I want to prove myself by my own efforts, I want to bear the risk of life myself, I want to be responsible for my own destiny. You, the state, make sure that I can do this. [...] You, state, do not take care of my affairs, but give me so much freedom and leave me so much of the yield of my work that I am able to shape my existence, my fate and that of my family myself’”.

The activities of the state thus follow the principle of subsidiarity. This means that it focuses only on those tasks that cannot be performed at a lower level (individual, local, regional).

A comparison of the old world with the new gives the following picture:

	20th century - state as order for society, intervening regulatory policy	21st century - state as a facilitating part of a network, empowering "Regulatory Policy Plus"
Center	State and bureaucracy as regulatory powers	Citizens and people as orientation
Purpose	Law and order; internal and external security	Serving citizens and people in the state
Workplace, organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • linear organizations, committees, forums, conferences, top-down, bureaucracy / plan and control • formal, permanent parties, representative democracy / party politics • States as primary actors (nationally and internationally) • Workplace for life; employment relationships • traditional, linear regulatory policy (top-down), state as steward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organic forms of organization, open forums, network • Citizens' initiatives, spontaneous, self-forming organizations / assemblies, limited in time and content; will for more direct democracy or self-determination • open, dynamic, organic networks of interests; state only a part of networks (not necessarily longer dominant) • More flexible workplaces and workplace design, work-life balance or work-life blending • Modern, open, enabling "regulatory" policy; state as shaper and promoter of infrastructure that enables and promotes the shaping of change by people and business
Innovation	General staff technology and innovation policy; striving for perfection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open culture of innovation; striving for new / experimenting / experiencing • technical, economic, and social change as an opportunity to shape the future sustainably for the common good
Results	limited planning horizon (election cycle); desire for quick solutions	Balance of short, medium and long-term / sustainable outcomes; eco-effectiveness ⁵³

Old vs. new state

Reorientation in the economy on a global scale

The World Economic Forum (WEF)⁵⁴ and especially its annual meetings in Davos have for years been regarded by critics as the symbol of neoliberal capitalism. Yet Klaus Schwab, founder and president of the WEF, takes a thoroughly critical view of neoliberal capitalism and calls for a rethink of government and administration, business and people. In his book *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*⁵⁵ he sets out a list of demands that already includes some of the essential features of Human Business:

State and administration

1. The state and its administration must become more Agile, understand citizens as customers, and invite and involve them in jointly shaping the future. There can be no grand plan for this simply because of the unknown future. That is why the design must proceed in small and steady steps.
2. The old separation of state and administration, business and citizens has had its day. It is important to find new ways of organizing in order to shape the future together.

Economy

1. The economy must invest in people, not as resources, but as people with huge potential.
2. Companies must open to Agile, human-centered management approaches and practice them. Meaning and ethics must not just be empty phrases but must be filled with life. Short-term profit-seeking must no longer be the most important driver, but long-term and sustainable value creation.
3. Companies must understand new technologies, use them and develop them further. Risks of new technologies must be recognized, but above all the opportunities must be exploited.

People

1. People must ask themselves how they want to live. This means exploring new things, experimenting, and developing visions.
2. The challenges of our time cannot be solved on a small scale. Schwab therefore calls on people to get involved politically and thus shape change in society together.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the WEF to launch a new global initiative: The Great Reset⁵⁶. It points out that, especially now in times of global pandemic, there is an urgent need for global stakeholders to work together to simultaneously address the direct consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and improve the state of the world. The next few years will show how far these initiatives can go and what successes they can achieve. The WEF initiative is proof that a shift in thinking from short-term to sustainable business has long since begun.

Now, it just so happens that not everyone like the WEF and its members is on the global macro level. Human Business becomes more tangible in that it also offers approaches for the micro level of life and work. In the next chapter, we will learn what this looks like in concrete terms by looking at several examples.

3. Human Business in Practice

“It’s not about ideas. It’s about making them possible.”

Scott Branson

Key points

- The software company Menlo Innovations shows that joy serves very well as a driver of economic activity and is worthwhile.
- If companies want to bring about change, they must actively decide to do so and act accordingly – even if these changes initially only take place at the project level.
- Continuous learning is about how a company can adapt to a changing world and how it can be a leader in that adaptation. That’s the part where we need to be most human.
- If we really want to stay on the path of increasing humanity in the workplace, we need to recognize that employees are 100% humans and not resources.
- Human Business is already being practiced today. Examples include individual companies in the German Mittelstand, social enterprises, and principles of corporate social responsibility.
- Many medium-sized companies have several Human Business characteristics: whether it is a clear focus on their customers, the appreciation of employees or the acknowledgement of social responsibility.
- Social business is also Human Business. However, not every Human Business is a social business. In social business, the focus is on the social aspect. In Human Business, the focus can be on the social aspect, but it does not have to be. Moreover, in Human Business – in contrast to social business – investors do not have to forego speculative profits. The concept of a Human Business is thus broader than that of a social business.
- The implementation of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be an example of the practice of Human Business – but only if CSR and the purpose of the company go hand in hand and CSR is not seen as a distraction from the actual core business, which may be anything but sustainable and socially responsible.
- The Human Business concept is designed to be suitable for both established companies and start-ups.
- Corporate credos can indicate whether and to what extent a company adheres to the traditional business model or has adapted to reality. The extent to which companies actually live their credo is, of course, another question and would have to be examined in each case.

Theory vs. practice?

The concept of Human Business is not an abstract or academic pipe dream. There are many companies that can already be described as Human Business today or whose environment is suitable for this. However, it is also a fact that the majority of companies and even organizations are still Tayloristic in nature. This means that they are developed and managed more like machines - with hierarchical levels, top-down management and short-term goals and profit maximization. However, they should not be demonized, especially since they can still change. Positive examples can help to provide orientation. Let's take a look at a few of them.

Inside a Human Business - Interview with Richard Sheridan, CEO of Menlo Innovations

Menlo Innovations is a software development company in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. It is significantly different from other IT companies. More than 3,000 people visit Menlo every year to see how it works. They are inspired by the people, the environment and the way Menlo functions. Co-founder, CEO and Chief Storyteller Richard Sheridan writes about this unique place in his bestselling books *Joy, Inc.: How We Built a Workplace People Love* (2015) and *Chief Joy Officer: How Great Leaders Elevate Human Energy and Eliminate Fear* (2018).



Richard Sheridan is co-founder and CEO of Menlo Innovations in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. (Image source: Menlo Innovations)

I first met Richard in 2015 when we both participated in the Learning Consortium for the Creative Economy. We shared ideas and stories about how much joy, happiness and humanity make huge differences in our world of work.

In an interview for this book, I asked Richard to share his insights about Menlo Magic, how it works, and how to develop an environment where joy and work go hand in hand.⁵⁷

Menlo's drive

Thomas: What is the driver of Menlo Innovations?

Richard: The term "joy" always enters our world here. What we talk about is that we've created an intentionally joyful culture.

To us, all of the words that people might ascribe to us like Agile or Lean, that sort of thing, we look at those things through a lens of a simple question: what problem are we trying to solve?

So, rather than pursuing Agile or lean as a goal, we look at it through this lens of problems we're trying to solve and how this helps end human suffering in the world as it relates to technology.

And so, we look at the tools of Agile and the tools of Lean for helping us do that.

Certainly, people who come here who know us well could easily describe us as an Agile organization. Linda Rising called us the most Agile organization in the world⁵⁸. I appreciate Linda's support when she says those things, but it isn't the thing we are pursuing.

We are pursuing this idea that we can one day delight the people we intend to serve - and that is our definition of joy - and we're going to do it by ending human suffering.

Human suffering

Thomas: What do you mean by ending human suffering?

Richard: Part of it is born out of my personal history. I've been running Menlo with my co-founder for 18 years now. Two years before that, James and I came together to form a public company that looks like Menlo today. In the 20 years before that, it wasn't like that at all. I was suffering. I was personally watching projects I was leading miss deadlines, blow budgets, deliver poor quality, work their teams to death, you know, your 24-hour, around the clock, work 7 days a week, people pulling all-nighters, staying all weekend, only to watch projects be cancelled before they actually get delivered. Or if they ever did get delivered, the users would throw up their hands and say, "Well, why doesn't it work like this? This isn't what we needed. Why...?" and, of course, the engineering teams would say, "Well, they're just stupid users. They don't understand our beautiful designs."

I watched all of this pain for a good portion of my career. I didn't want that anymore. I wanted people who were paying to create software to feel like they had control, that they had a voice, that they had a healthy interaction with the technical team that was creating it. So that was the first form of suffering for what I call the "sponsors" of software projects.

The second type of sufferer we have in mind is the end user, the people we ultimately want to serve with our work. If we actually take a different approach to the user experience, we can delight users. We can use software the way it's needed.

Too often, software teams might be tempted to say, "You know, if you learn to think like me, the software will make sense. " The question is, why does a normal, non-technological person have to think like the programmers? Why can't we make the computer and the software work the way humans do? We want to end this kind of suffering - that is, the suffering of the people who use software that teams like us develop every day.

And finally, we wanted to end the suffering of the people doing the work. Our industry coined the term "death march." That's working around the clock, teams and people burning themselves out in their work - leading to burnout. The problem is that tired people make bad software. We don't want to make bad software, ergo we don't want tired employees.

So, these are the three pillars of suffering that we wanted to end. But we did not want to call it just "suffering". We wanted to characterize it in terms of a nobler goal. And that idea is to bring joy back to technology for the people who do the work, the people who pay for the work, and the people who use the work.

Menlo magic

Thomas: What is the Menlo Magic? How does it work? And, why does it work every single day?

Richard: I think there are two fundamental reasons why Menlo works so well.

Number one, the people who work here internalize our philosophy of work. This is not some kind of mantra or discipline or methodology or process or, if you will, religion that I think software teams often end up in.

And the second part is – and this sounds a bit strange: The people who work here want Menlo to survive the next day. They don't want to go back to the other, traditional business world. They really want to work here.

Menlo model scaling

Thomas: Would it be possible to scale your model?

Richard: We have about 60 employees now. A lot of people say, "Oh, I see it works for 60, but it can't work for 90 or 200 or 2,000." But we actually found examples of companies that work like we do, just on a much larger scale – and yet still decentralized and very sense- and purpose-driven.

I remind companies that even if they are a large company, they are usually made up of teams of 50 to 100 people. Regardless of how big the company really is, they don't have to change the whole world just to work the way we do at Menlo. They don't have to change their entire organization. They can just change the part around them.

Menlo is in some ways much, much, much bigger than the 60 employees we have today. Because we tie Menlo as a company into some of the largest organizations in the world. We've worked for Ford. We've worked for General Motors. We've worked for Pfizer. All of these huge companies use our team. They didn't have to change their company just to work with us. And we didn't have to change how we worked just to work with them.

In some ways, we're seeing how a small, cohesive team can create a certain culture and serve others who don't necessarily value the same cultural elements that they do. That's what I think scaling is all about.

We have created our own environment. And it's quite interesting that many people visit us to see it. Every year, about 3,000 people from all over the world come through our doors and want to observe how we work.⁵⁹ We do about one to three tours a day here. And every time people come here and visit, they take a piece of us back to their own environment.

We don't tell them that we've found the one true way, that they should work like Menlo, that otherwise it won't work. But they will always take something away and start to improve their lives, their world, their working world.

Imagine you're in a big company... and your team works differently than any other team in the company, so other people in the company visit you to see how you work. When you share with them what you've learned, they take pieces back to their organization to try it out. And it doesn't have to be exactly how they saw it before on your team.

I think this is one of the challenges with scaling. People think, "Oh, we have to replicate it. It has to be identical in every place you go." I just don't think that's true.

Menlo doesn't have to be the same for every client project, and we certainly don't always have to have the same types of clients we work with.

I don't want to let your readers off the hook here. By that I mean they might come to Menlo, read our interview or maybe read my books and say, "Oh, Rich and his team, they're so lucky. I wish I could be like them." But I can't, because our organization is too big, too small, too old, too new, or too rigid. "I can't accept that excuse. Because I've seen so many examples of great companies that have taken home a piece of what they learned from us to integrate into their teams and improve their work environment. My message to your readers is that they can change their business. They just have to choose to do so.

Thomas: So true. That's my philosophy as well. For example, I believe in the magic of smaller projects rather than huge corporate programs that can easily become death march projects to save the world or the entire organization. Instead, I suggest doing individual projects. In a sense, a project is like a microcosm a team can control. We can shape it however we like, and we can change it if we need to. At the corporate level, it's much more complicated with all the politics and bureaucracy.

The importance of the workspace

Thomas: How does the work environment affect team productivity? What impact does it have on atmosphere, performance and results?

Richard: I think it's, as Dickens would say, "A Tale of Two Cities" for us. Our company is in what used to be a shopping center. Actually, the space behind me used to be an area with a lot of restaurants and food stands. It is in the basement of a parking garage and there is no sunlight at all. I want your readers to know that if we can work in the windowless basement of a parking garage with joy, they can do it wherever they are. No matter where.

A lot of people ask us, "Oh, you didn't want sunlight?" "No, we wanted sunlight, but we wanted three other things.



A look inside Menlo's offices. (Image source: Menlo Innovations)

First, we wanted a large, open space.

Second, we wanted to be in downtown Ann Arbor because we think the physical environment enhances our thinking about work. That's because there are a lot of amenities downtown. People can leave the building, walk down the street, or go to restaurants and bars in the area. There are small parks nearby and so on.

And third, we wanted to be able to afford it.

As a result, we have lost natural light.

But when people walk through our door for the first time, the first word they say is "Wow". Because they can actually feel the human energy of our space. I think that's very important. They can hear laughter and conversations; they can see people working together.

And suddenly they realize, "Oh my God! There are no walls, there are no offices, there are no cubes, there are no doors." And then they ask, they say, "Oh, this is one of those open office environments, isn't it? There are studies that prove that those environments don't work." And yet, they face this paradox with us. They ask us, "Rich, why is it working for you guys and not working elsewhere?" And I answer, "Well, it's very simple. We didn't create an open office. We created an open culture. Our physical space reflects some of our deeply held cultural beliefs about how we create great teams: openness, transparency, collaboration, teamwork, flexibility, and scalability."

All we've done here is tell the teams, "Design the space to work for you." They don't have to ask permission. They simply design the space in which they work.

So, our workspace changes every day in small steps. Every now and then, the team gets bored with the setup, tears the whole thing down, and puts it back together in a completely different configuration. And I can attest that these small and sometimes big changes release energy. You know that over time we all become a product of our physical space. I believe that Churchill said that we shape our spaces first and then they shape us.

And if we put up all these walls and corridors and close doors that we can't move them, your organization stays frozen and communication breaks down. Whereas we want people to always have that adaptive mindset and be able to act accordingly. What if we put furniture this way or that way? How does that feel, and could it change our energy?

I sit in the room with everyone else. There is no corner office for me. Every once in a while, I have to move around. I don't really choose where I sit. The teams move my table somewhere. Right now, I'm at the same table for several months - which is a bit unusual for me.

As a rule, there is a reason for a move. It doesn't just happen by chance. Then I come into my office the next morning and find that my desk is no longer where it was yesterday. And then I have to find it and get used to it over the next few days. Something like that literally nudges my brain. It creates a passive beta thought process that turns into an alpha mode. I am now much more aware of my physical surroundings again and can feel them.

It can be frustrating because I'm used to going to the same place and working there. At the same time, it's stimulating because I have to think differently. I can't think the same thoughts I did the day before because I'm in a new space now. I'm probably surrounded by new people, different interactions, different conversations that I overhear from different people because I'm sitting around different people now. And that, I think, awakens our humanity when we do those kind of things.

Interaction with customers and end users

Thomas: You talk about delighting your customers. How do you identify the true needs of your customers?

Richard: There are two types of conversations that go on here. I differentiate between two groups of people who are often get put together.

One group is that of customers. Today, Menlo is a custom software design and development firm. Customers bring a lot of money and their own ideas. We form teams for their ideas and design and develop software for our customers. The customer is the one who pays us for the work.

However, our primary thought process is not that of the customer, although of course we have to deal with that. Who we want to deal with are people we will never meet, people who don't pay us for what we do, and people who never know who we are. It's the end users of the software. And that's very important.

In the working world, there is often the distinction between customers and users, especially when companies collaborate with other companies. And we have to take that into account when we work on our projects.

I want to answer your question in two different ways. A client, meaning the person who pays us, walks through our door and says, "Hey. We've heard great things about you guys. We think you guys could help us build an app for an iPhone." We look at the customer and say, "Great. What problem are you trying to solve?" They are irritated and reply, "Well, the problem is that we don't have an app." We then explain, "No, an app is a possible solution. But in the history of mankind, no one has ever woken up in the morning and thought first thing, "You know what I need today more than anything? A new app."

So, we try to figure out with them what problem they want to solve. This is a really curious little journey, because often they think that the problem is not the problem. We also often ask our customers if we can visit some potential users of the new solution.

We once had a large logistics company ask us to develop a new CRM system for customer relationship management. It would have been a very big project for us at the time, maybe one of our biggest. We started by asking them, "What problem are you trying to solve?" And they said, "We need a new CRM system." We said, "Why do you need a new CRM system?" "Well, we've grown through acquisition. We're now a nationwide company. Before, we were just a regional company. Because of all our acquisitions, each individual company has its own CRM system. We now want to create a unified CRM system for the entire company so that our offices across the country can share all of their customer information with each other."

As an engineer, this made perfect sense to me. But we said, "Could we go to your sales offices?" They looked at us funny and said, "Oh, we know you'd like to do that. But we know what the problem is, you don't have to do that." We replied, "Well, can we at least look at two offices?" And they said, "Sure." So, our anthropologists visited two offices of this company. They started observing the work there, and they asked the employees questions. They explained, "Hey. We're going to watch you work. Because your management at headquarters thinks you're having problems sharing customer information between offices." The office staff smiled politely at us and said, "Oh, we never share information with another office." We said, "How?! You all work for the same company, don't you?" They said, "Yes, we do. But our annual bonus depends on how far we outperform the other offices. When we are asked for information by another office, we deliberately make mistakes, such as giving the wrong phone number, address, or name. In fact, we will not give the other offices an advantage - and so then outperform them and secure a bigger bonus for ourselves."

We realized that the problem with this company was not a lack of a CRM system. It was the incentive system that was not right. We think that we humans are rational and logical beings. But in fact, we create strange behaviors when we set the wrong incentives. We went back to the management team and said, "Don't run your project now. Not yet. Fix your compensation system first. Fix your culture first, and then maybe put a unified CRM system in place."

Cultivating a learning landscape

Thomas: How do you cultivate an environment of continuous learning and innovation?

Richard: I think it's very important for all of us as leaders to think about what actually makes us human. What are the fundamental characteristics of humanity? And I think they revolve around the part of our brain, the prefrontal cortex, where our most human things like creativity, invention, innovation, and learning happen. All of these things happen in the most human part of our brain.

There is a counter-question to learning: "What must we as leaders not do if we want to promote learning?" We must consider that fear overrides humanity and learning in our brains. It releases chemicals into our bloodstream, adrenaline and cortisol. And those turn off that big part of our brain, the prefrontal cortex, because that part of our brain needs so much oxygen.

“What should we do as leaders not do to promote learning?” Lead with the help of fear. If we lead with fear, our teams will only think with the reptilian brain and no learning will take place at all. Except perhaps pain-based learning, which is important, no question. Because we can also learn something from pain. For example, we’ve all touched a hot stove at least once in our lives, and we’ve learned never to do that again.

But the kind of learning that companies are striving for now, in my view, is not about “not touching the hot stove.” It’s about how we outperform our competition, how we adapt to a changing world, and how we lead in that adaptation. And that’s the part where we need to be most human.

So, number one, learn to eliminate fear as a tool in leadership and management as much as possible... Because, when we lead and motivate with fear-based tactics, we lose the most human part of our team.

This brings up another question, “How do we create the environment where learning can just happen?” For us, the physical space is important. It’s not just the open space, it’s the posters on the wall, it’s the bright lights. It’s that feeling, that wow feeling when people come in.

And then the other part is how we organize people into the team. No one here works in isolation. We always work in pairs.



At Menlo, all software developers always work in pairs. This is called “paired programming”. Not only is the work faster, but the quality of the software is also significantly higher right from the start. - (Image source: Menlo Innovations)

This simple construct of bringing people together, letting them work together, giving them permission to work together, and making that a standard of our work means that no one ever works in the fearful isolation of "It's all on me, it's all on my shoulders. I have to do and accomplish everything on my own."

For us, the idea of bringing people together creates security. I can lean on the person next to me, and conversely, I expect the person next to me to lean on me. The idea of making your partner look good, of helping the person next to you succeed, creates a kind of safety in which learning and creativity can flourish and human energy can be released.

Ensure discipline, performance and achievement

Thomas: Learning is one thing. But how do you ensure discipline, performance and achievement?

Richard: There are two basic components of how we think here at Menlo.

One is that we have a very structured environment.

So, it's not laissez-faire along the lines of, "Do whatever you want, you get a random idea, go in a corner and start working on it on your own." We have a very, very strong structure here, but also just a very simple structure. So, everybody knows who they're working with this week. There's a little display at the entrance that tells employees on the first day of the week, "Oh, I'm working with Thomas." A week later, they know, "Oh, I'm working with Michael this week, and Thomas is working with Richard."

This construct starts to remove a lot of ambiguity and goes towards clarity. This is very important in our world, because ultimately, by the time we are working on tasks, we are in a very ambiguous environment where there must be invention and experimentation. When everyone knows what they are supposed to be working on, what their goals are and how they will be evaluated, what progress they are making, and what comes next, it is a highly structured environment.

And the other part that says a lot about how we work is systemic thinking. Systems are at their best when there are short communication and feedback loops.

And that's what we like so much about the Agile way of working. Normally, in our world, we work with a five-day iterative cycle. Every five days, something we call "show and tell" takes place with

our customer. But it's not us, it's our customers showing us the work we've done over the last five days because we want them to evaluate it, engage with the software, and feel the progress. The team that worked on it can see how the customer reacts to what we did. That's very valuable feedback.

So, it's not about creating the perfect plan or the perfect planning process. It's about acknowledging that we're going to make mistakes. We are human. The way to keep fear down is to make small mistakes quickly and learn from them.

We have created a system and structure that allows us to quickly make small mistakes. We can correct them while they are still small. We also maintain open and honest communication, which is critical in this type of environment. We can deal with things as they come up. I think that's the essence of an Agile company.

Well-being of employees

Thomas: In the past, you allowed parents to bring their babies if they couldn't find childcare for that day. Does that rule still exist? How has it changed your work environment?

Richard: Yes. In the last twelve years, we've already had 24 babies.

This has been a great experiment for us and it's wonderful. And yes, over the last twelve years, we have continuously improved the physical aspects of this space to make it easier for parents to watch their child.

But I want to make it very clear, this is not a Menlo daycare. The baby is with the parents all day or, if the parents want, often with the team. So, when you bring your child, you might say to Rich, "Hey, do you want to hold little Elsie for a while?" And, of course, I love holding little kids, so I get caught on a tour with a baby. But that's always the parent's choice.

When we think about how to bring humanity to our workplace, well, we do, especially through little people.

I mean, babies have such incredible human energy. They're like little sponges. They want to hear all the sounds and it's really fun. When they're here a few months, they usually mimic what they hear. I remember little Maggie doing what we affectionately called "dolphin sounds." She was just mimicking the sound. And it was so loud that the whole team heard it and just laughed. It was a wonderful interaction with a baby.

Joy and work

Thomas: How do joy and work go together?

Richard: I think the idea of living humanity and bringing our most human selves to work – and we use the term “joy” here – I think is very human. But I also want to emphasize that this is real work that we’re doing here. Joy is a beautiful thing and I think we get very close every day, but we are not happy here every day. It is hard work, hard work done together.

Our customers often have different expectations of us. So, we always have to see how things are going and what the customers’ needs and feelings are. And they don’t always feel great. The same is true for us.

As leaders, if we really want to increase humanity in the workplace, we need to remember that the people who work here are 100% human. When we recognize that they have lives outside of work, it’s easier to show empathy to others on our team. Every family, every person has their past life experiences, upbringings, things that have happened in the world, people and things they care about.

So, I want to encourage your readers to think about something: If there is conflict with someone else on their team, talk to the other person instead of getting upset or angry first. Look the person in the eye and ask, “Are you okay? Is everything okay?”

The person may or may not open up and tell you. That’s okay. It’s not about bringing everything to work every day. But a simple, “Hey, I noticed something wrong today. Are you okay? Is everything okay with you?”, can work wonders.

If the other person is holding something back or you are still upset about something, ask yourself if perhaps that upset is coming from yourself. Be humble enough to ask yourself, “Am I okay? Am I okay with you? Is there anything I’ve done that might have upset you?” Then we have the opportunity to actually have a heart-to-heart discussion about what’s going on. Again, not everyone is going to feel comfortable. And that’s okay, too.

German Mittelstand

As examples of companies that are predestined for Human Business, I would like to mention large parts of the German Mittelstand, successful small and medium-sized enterprises in Germany, Austria and Switzerland that are sometimes referred to as hidden champions.⁶⁰ Although many medium-sized companies still have a Tayloristic structure today, they generally exhibit some characteristics of Human Business. First of all, I would like to mention their traditionally clear focus on their customers. Due to their size alone, they usually have a shorter route to them. Consequently, they know their customers better, understand their needs, know how to satisfy their interests, and can delight them.

Employees are viewed and treated as the treasures of medium-sized companies. Occupational safety and co-determination are as natural as social security and further development. However, there are areas where equal rights for men and women - especially in family-owned companies - are not yet being implemented across the board. The proportion of women in higher management positions is very low, and the salary gap between men and women is not uncommon either.

Profitability is very important for every company, including SMEs. The difference is that traditional German SMEs also see themselves as part of society, are firmly rooted in the region, identify with it. Medium- and long-term goals are as important as short-term goals. So is the striving to constantly develop and become better.

From this perspective, the German Mittelstand as well as other small and medium-sized enterprises are predestined for the transformation toward Human Business. International competition changes this in that they must adapt to the customs of the market and the competition. Whether this changes the DNA of a medium-sized company is another question.

For SMEs, too, the challenge is to cope with the challenges of the VUCA world. Practices established in the past may also reach their limits here. Understanding, accepting, and adapting to the challenges correctly is essential

for the survival of any company. But this is not the same as abandoning a corporate culture based on human values and principles.

Traditionally, Tayloristic companies have a hard time coping with the challenges of today. In this respect, the appeal that SMEs should take their cue from large-scale Tayloristic companies should be taken with a grain of salt, as it can be misleading. It is better to be aware of one's roots and strengths, to play to them and to develop one's own potential, and at the same time to be open to new approaches such as Agile leadership and product development, which we will look at in Chapter 16.

A wonderful illustration of a metamorphosis of a traditionally run Mittelstand into a prosperous Human Business is *metafinanz*.

The transformation of business into new models for Economy 4.0 is at the core of *metafinanz* Business & IT Consulting based in Munich, Stuttgart and Frankfurt, Germany. The company is a subsidiary of the international insurance group Allianz SE and has been advising its clients for more than 30 years in the areas of new work, digitalization, risk and security. It employs almost 800 people and generated a turnover of 230 million euros in 2020.

The starting point of the transformation

As part of a highly regulated insurance group, *metafinanz* had established itself over the years as a classically operating organization, with all the red tape that go with it: multi-level decision-making processes and high annual planning costs. The company was doing well. And yet questions were raised about its prospects in an increasingly dynamic and complex world, a highly competitive and volatile business landscape, all while taking into account the changing demands and needs of its valued customers.

Employees, too, were making new demands. They wanted to take on more personal responsibility, and desired purpose-driven work in a more "human" environment. In order to remain agile, fast, adaptable and successful, and to give our colleagues more responsibility, the organization took a radical path. In 2017, *metafinanz* launched a major transformation. With a big bang, after only a few months of preparation, the structure of the organization was turned upside down.

What makes metafinanz tick today

Since then, the company has been evolving every day. With more than 60 now self-organizing and autonomous teams, the organization has become more agile. Teams act like small enterprises within the company - called intrapreneurs. They are accountable for their own profit and loss statement, and decide autonomously on investments, new employees or sales activities within a given framework. Central plans and budgets are obsolete.

Hierarchical organizational structures have been replaced by decentralized structures in the transformation. Self-organization and personal responsibility are central elements. It means: the organization trusts that the teams themselves decide best how to run their business, how to set themselves up, how to use their potential. Each team decides within a company-wide framework how to organize themselves, how to perform tasks, or in short, how to shape leadership.

The basis of the organizational model is a positive image of humankind and a framework in which people can grow. Trust rather than control, freedom rather than constraints, networking rather than silos. Self-organized teams have created a stronger commitment to the business and closer ties with customers.

Today's corporate culture is characterized by active listening, visionary thinking and entrepreneurial action at every level. metafinanz combines the performance, experience and sustainability of a mature company with the style and character of a start-up. The company is characterized by a lively work and management culture, driven by agility, creativity, innovative spirit and responsiveness, with a strong focus on well-being and health.

Whereas at the beginning of the transformation there were just under 40 business teams looking after customers, there are now over 60. Over the past few years, teams have been closed and new teams established. Some topics and business areas were dropped, others opened. All these changes are in line with the goals of the business: to be agile and, above all, close to the needs of its customers. "We are never finished" is not an empty phrase shared by peers. They are convinced of it. And today's metafinanz' organizational form reflects this continuous willingness to change.

Social Business

“Social business or social enterprise is an economic concept often attributed to Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus.”⁶¹ Social businesses pursue the goal of solving social and environmental problems with the help of their entrepreneurial activities. In doing so, they differ from traditional companies in two key characteristics:

1. The purpose of social business is solely to solve important social or environmental problems.
2. Investors in social businesses refrain from speculative profits.

*“In contrast to social projects with the same content objectives, social businesses operate like conventional companies. However, most of the profit remains in the company and the dividend is case-limited and serves to expand the service through the growth of the company.”*⁶²

There are many examples of social enterprises; here are just a few.⁶³

- **Grameen Bank** is a microfinance lending institution founded in 1983 that provides microloans to people without income security in Bangladesh in an attempt to alleviate poverty among the population.⁶⁴
- **Yunus Social Business (YSB)** is a social business venture capital fund and advisory firm that initiates and manages social business development programs worldwide. YSB supports and finances the development of social businesses through local, national incubator funds.⁶⁵
- **Chemonics International, Inc.** is a Washington, DC-based economic development company and think tank for developing countries. The employee-owned, for-profit company provides a variety of services around the world - from planning and implementing technical projects, such as in agribusiness or medicine, to democracy development, supply chain management, and integrated solutions in research and development or innovation support. The consulting firm has been

awarded some of the largest U.S. government assistance contracts such as for White Helmets support in Syria or the Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement Governance project in Nigeria. Chemonics is often referred to as the “Beltway Bandit.”⁶⁶

- A good example of a “social return on investment” is **PROJEKTFABRIK**, based in Witten, Germany. Young long-term unemployed people are made fit for the job market again with theater plays and job application training. Under the guidance of educators, they write plays and perform them in front of an audience.⁶⁷
- The **VAUDE Academy for Sustainable Management** in Tett nang, Germany, shares its years of expertise in sustainable apparel production to support other companies’ transformation processes towards sustainable management, and ensure that education for sustainable development is strongly anchored in schools and universities in ways that are both practical and tangible.⁶⁸
- **Kiva** is a U.S. non-profit organization that enables individuals to make microloans online to small businesses and individuals primarily in developing countries through microfinance institutions.⁶⁹

Sometimes social entrepreneurs are called idealists because they primarily want to solve social problems in the areas of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, or human rights. I find this designation misleading. It is true that social entrepreneurs do not choose profit maximization as their driver. The purpose and thus the driver of social enterprises is to find entrepreneurial answers to social issues. Profits, however, are not demonized. They are important, very much so. But just not as an end, but as a means. This is a key differentiator between social businesses and traditional businesses, where profits often come first. It is also what distinguishes a social business from charitable companies and organizations that do not actually want to make a profit and at best aim to break even.

So, let’s be clear: a social business is also a Human Business. However, not every Human Business has to be a social business. In a social business, the focus is on the social aspect. In Human Business, the focus can be on the social aspect, but it doesn’t have to be. Moreover, in Human Business, unlike social business, investors do not have to forego speculative profits. The concept of Human Business is therefore broader than that of social business.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Elements of the Human Business concept can also be found in the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

CSR encompasses “the voluntary contribution of business to sustainable development that goes beyond the legal requirements. CSR stands for responsible corporate action in the actual business activity (market), through ecologically relevant aspects (environment) to relations with employees (workplace) and interaction with the relevant stakeholders.”⁷⁰

In the modern understanding, CSR is increasingly understood as a holistic corporate concept that integrates all sustainability dimensions and includes all “social, ecological and economic contributions of a company to the voluntary assumption of social responsibility that go beyond legal compliance.”⁷¹

The corporate concept of corporate social responsibility is applicable to all types and sizes of companies. The only question is whether companies pursue this concept as a purpose or merely as a supplement to economic drivers. If short-term profit maximization remains in the foreground and in first place, corporate social responsibility is not far behind. In this respect, the question of authenticity quickly arises here.

Thus, the implementation of the corporate concept of corporate social responsibility can be an example of Human Business in practice - but only if CSR and the purpose of the company go hand in hand and CSR is not seen as a distraction from the actual core business, which is anything but sustainable and socially responsible.

The social enterprise design approach

Another example of a Human Business is the social enterprise design approach. Based on a global study of key trends in the entrepreneurial workforce, Volini, Schwartz, Roy, Hauptmann, Durme, Denny, and Bersin (2019) outlined the concept of a social enterprise, which goes far beyond corporate social responsibility.⁷² According to this concept, a social enterprise is an organization whose mission is to combine revenue growth and profit with the need to respect and protect its own employees, the corporate environment, and the environment. A Social Enterprise seeks to be “a good citizen” both inside and outside the organization and to foster a high level of collaboration at all levels of the organization.

In their study, the authors propose five principles for designing a social enterprise:



Design principles for the social enterprise⁷³

Deloitte’s Global Human Trends study from the summer of 2020 shows that the social enterprise approach is not just an academic exercise, but offers valuable guidance for sustainable business, especially in times of increasing uncertainty.⁷⁴ Similar to the Human Business approach I present in this book, Deloitte’s social enterprise approach manages to bring business and people or society together - for the benefit of us all.

Company credos

Finally, we can use corporate credos to see if and to what extent a company adheres to the traditional business model or has adapted to the new challenges and unknowns of today. To what extent companies really live their credo is, of course, another question and would have to be examined in each case - for example, with the help of the ten design principles for a Human Business. Let's look at a few examples of promising corporate credos.

“Here I am human, this is where I shop” is the corporate credo of the drugstore retailer dm-drogerie markt GmbH + Co. KG, headquartered in Karlsruhe, Germany.⁷⁵ Since 1992, this credo has expressed the attitude of the company, which is consistently committed to the idea of “humanity and partnership” in all its relationships with customers, employees and trading partners, right through to the environment.

“We unleash superpowers! “is the motto of the Hero Society in Leipzig.⁷⁶ This Human Business accompanies young people and shows them what they are made of. They learn about self-efficacy through team-challenges and make hidden talents visible through a special screening and coaching process. Hero Society offers them the opportunity to recognize what they are made of, what distinguishes them and what kind of people they want to be in this world - not as resources, but as humans.

Under the motto “For a working world with more meaning and humanity! “, the managing director of the vacation provider Upstalsboom Hotel + Freizeit GmbH & Co. KG⁷⁷ in Emden, Germany, Bodo Janssen, and his team have built up a value-oriented company over the last ten years that is known far beyond its borders and is presented in the documentary *The Silent Revolution* by Kristian Gründling.⁷⁸

The outdoor outfitter VAUDE from Tett nang, Germany, is driven to live up to its values and take on responsibility for the people of the world and the planet itself. It vows to take environmental and social factors into account in everything it does. One of its guiding principle is: “Thinking with foresight. Being considerate in our

dealings with others. Acting from the heart. This is how we can move forward. In outdoor sports. In everyday life. And in the development of sustainable products. Because future generations will only be able to enjoy the mountains and a pristine planet if we conserve what we love.⁷⁹

Johnson & Johnson's corporate credo is engraved in granite at the entrance to the company's headquarters. It declares that customers come first, employees second and shareholders last. Clearly, Johnson & Johnson is not yet a Human Business. But the company at least recognizes that shareholder interests and shareholder value are not suitable as the primary driver of sustainable business.⁸⁰

Another example is Procter & Gamble, which states in its "Mission Statement": "We will provide branded products and services of superior quality and value that improve the lives of the world's consumers, now and for generations to come. As a result, consumers will reward us with leadership sales, profit, and value creation, allowing our people, our shareholders and the communities in which we live and work to prosper." In this sense, a company that has forgotten or neglected its motivation or vision and traded it for short-term gains like maximizing daily stock prices is digging its own grave in the long run. It is the opposite of a meaning-driven company and economy.

Part 2:
Rediscovering Our Human Being



When we talk about “Human Business”, we must of course talk about people. “Human” comes first and before “business” for a reason. And it is the most important and significant feature of Human Business. Part 2 sheds light on our human nature. And yet, it would be presumptuous to describe the human being in just a few pages. It would not do justice to its complexity. Rather, the aim is to provide impulses and food for thought that help us rediscover our human being and our creative potential and bring these into Human Business and thus into shaping our future. It is not my intention to give ready-made answers to the questions of our time. Rather, it is about identifying tools for the journey of shaping our future.

Chapter 4 “Questions as answers to questions of our time” presents a first, important companion for shaping our journey in the digital age: Questions and their necessity and added value. As contradictory as this *questions as answers to questions* concept may seem at first glance, questions open the doors to learning and knowledge - two basic requirements for survival in today’s world. Questions help us move from the passivity of not knowing to actively shaping our lives. The only problem is that we have forgotten or have become too comfortable asking questions. This problem must be solved if we want to orient ourselves in the digital world. In this context, it is the questions themselves that can be valuable and indispensable companions in the search for orientation when shaping our journey in the digital age.

How to begin the search for orientation, for safety and security, is discussed in Chapter 5, “In Search of Orientation.” In order to find orientation, we need space and time to pause. We must create this space for ourselves. In a hectic world, this can be more difficult, because it is sometimes exactly the opposite of what we are used to or what is expected from us: to come to rest, to take a breath, to come to oneself - only to possibly realize that one is living in an illusory world. This can be both a shock and a relief. The search for orientation does not take away our sense of security, safety and support. It gives them to us. Especially when we do this with others. In other words: if we set out together in search of orientation in the digital world, there is huge potential for discovery, experience, and innovation in this human togetherness, provided we allow ourselves to get involved. And provided we don't let outdated social and behavioral norms prevent us from doing so.

As we learn in Chapter 6 “Boys Don't Cry - Men Do!”, social norms of behavior can give us stability and orientation. This is true as long as these norms are contemporary. Norms like “Boys don't cry!”, on the other hand, are not only outdated, but nonsense. They lead to emotions being banned from everyday life. But if we suppress our emotions, we deceive ourselves and give up an important element of our own humanity. When men cry, it often doesn't fit into our image of the ideal, controlled world. Alas, what if this image is long outdated and a deception, and crying and thus showing human vulnerability fits very well into this image? Vulnerability is the opposite of predictability and control. In a world that is changing ever faster and in which interrelationships are more complex and less predictable, plannability and the desire for control reach their limits. Old tools such as process optimization or innovation planning have had their day. They remain blunt and can at best provide short-term relief. On the other hand, this gives free space for new ideas and approaches.

One of these approaches is familiar to us humans from childhood days: playing. In Chapter 7, “Playing,” we look at how children and adults play and see how that can help us meet the challenges of the day. In play, on the one hand, fun and joy are central. On the other hand, exploration and learning are no less important. In play and learning, openness, curiosity, presence, and joy combine. These are elements of generative learning - and this is essential for shaping the VUCA world. If we suppress generative learning in children or adults, i.e., the harmony of play and exploration, we prevent progress.

We can understand and treat digitization as a play and tool - both for exploring and for shaping our own world. In this way, we can view the challenges of the VUCA world less as problems and more as an invitation to rediscover, develop and live out our innate, generative urge to learn and play. The prerequisite for this is that we trust and allow ourselves to do so. I will try to answer how we can achieve this in Chapter 8 “Paths to Being Human”.

The chapter contains a whole series of individual idea splinters and thought-provoking impulses that can help us to be more honest with ourselves. It is about exploring ways to find our true selves in the mechanical, technology driven VUCA world. It is about becoming and being human again. The individual ideas in this chapter can help provide answers to the questions of who we really are and where we want to go. These answers are the basis for shaping our future.

One key to turning ideas into action and thus being human can be found in gratitude. Why this is so can be found in Chapter 9, “Gratitude”. If we call the VUCA world a crisis of humanity, we are dealing with both risks and opportunities. We need to understand the risks and control them as best we can. We must take advantage of the opportunities. In this respect, we may well be grateful for the challenges and unanswered questions of the digital world. After all, they are an opportunity to prove our existing strengths and ingenuity, to try out new things and to learn. Ultimately, they are a unique opportunity to shape our present and future. They are a call to try new things in life - not always serious and controlled, but also playful and light. It is a call for the dance of life.

The metaphor of describing life as a dance is taken up and discussed in Chapter 10, “Dancing Life.” Here, the metaphor can have several perspectives: (1) we dance life, (2) life dances us, (3) life dances with us, or (4) we dance with life. No matter which perspective we choose, it is crucial that we know which role we should, must or want to take. This realization is, as it were, the first step in opening the dance and shaping life.

4. Questions As Answers to Questions of Our Time

“The greatest gift is not being afraid to ask questions.”
Ruby Dee

Key points:

- We have forgotten or often have become too lazy to ask questions.
- We do not acknowledge our own inquisitiveness. We underestimate our urge and need for orientation both in the here-and-now and for tomorrow.
- The way we ask a question has a great influence on our answers and thus on our own horizon of understanding.
- Reframing, i.e., rephrasing questions and challenges, expands our horizons of understanding.
- Questions are door openers to learning and knowledge. They open spaces for the accumulation of knowledge and the exchange of ideas and experiences. They help us to move from the passivity of not knowing into the activity of learning and to shape life in this way.
- Questions are first important companions for shaping our journey in the digital age.

WEF Open Forum 2019

January 2019. I attend a panel of the Open Forum of the World Economic Forum (WEF). Sitting next to me is an elderly couple. We strike up a conversation. As it turns out, they are from Davos, have been attending the public Open Forum for years and thus participate in the WEF.

This year, digital transformation is one of the hot topics at the WEF. I ask them what they think about it. “Honestly, we are worried, even afraid of the digital transformation. Where does it leave people? Where does it leave us? What happens to us when more and more machines and technologies come along that we don’t understand?”

An honest answer and at the same time a question from older fellow citizens on an important topic of our time. I explain that I’m not quite so skeptical about digital change, that I see more opportunities in it. They then ask me why. I list several benefits that digital transformation would bring, starting with autonomous driving, advances in medical research and, and, and. They are not convinced and repeat their skepticism.

I ask them if they know how they want to live. They look at me astonished. Of course, they have an idea, many of them. And not only that. They live their ideas.

Now I ask if and how technology could help make their lives easier. And again, they give me some examples of how they are already using technology today and outline several other possibilities they are thinking of.

At this point, I repeat my question from the beginning of the conversation about what they think of the digital transformation. They think for a moment, look at me and then say, “Yes, now that we’ve taken a different look at it, we do see many opportunities and possibilities in the digital transformation after all.”

Dad, why?

I remember when my children, Rea and Aiyana, were kindergarten age. They were ordinary kids, playing a lot, frolicking with their friends, and bubbling over with energy and zest for action. And they asked many questions about God and the world. Their favorite question was, “Why?”

What a delight it was at first to observe their thirst for knowledge. Only, as it is with why questions, they just didn't seem to stop. At the latest, after the third or fourth why-question to an answer I had just given, I rolled my eyes and tried to put an end to the never-ending worm of questions. I even succeeded. For a few minutes. Shortly after, in fact, there were new phenomena that had gained their attention. The questions began anew.

At some point I reacted with annoyance and exhaustion and only said “Don't ask!” or tried to keep Rea and Aiyana busy with other things and thus distract them. Just please, not another seemingly endless round of why-questions.

(Big) questions of our time

Questions accompany us from childhood. The famous why questions in preschool are being replaced by more specific questions such as “Who, how, what, why?”. This is a good thing, because after all, there are a multitude of questions that we deal with. Be it issues of the environment, climate change, politics, homeland and homeland security, the economy, social justice, vacation planning, and, and, and. It’s not that we don’t have a lack of questions. But it is astonishing that we often leave out many questions of our time. Either because we are overwhelmed by them or because we hope that others will answer them for us.

In May 2019, at an event hosted by the German-American Institute in Heidelberg, I asked Prof. Dr. Tobias Kollmann, Chair of E-Business and E-Entrepreneurship at the University of Duisburg-Essen, what questions his students were bombarding him with. He looked at me in consternation and explained that this was not really a problem. The real problem, he said, was that his students sometimes no longer asked any questions at all but swallowed everything that was presented. They take notes neatly (or type them), learn by heart, in order to do as well as possible on the next exam. Questions? Not a chance.

But then, why are we being slowed down?

What is happening here right now? Why does there seem to be an aversion to questions? Why are we annoyed when our own children come to us with endless why questions? Why are students taught less about critical questioning and more about the importance of cramming through school material in the allotted time? Why do we encourage new employees to be curious and open-minded, only to tell them after a few days that they should stop asking so many questions and concentrate on their work instead? Why do politicians wave off talk shows when they either can't or won't answer simple questions of the day, and then beat around the bush?

You get the impression that questions are something disgusting, undesirable, uncomfortable. The trick is to avoid them and look the other way. We would rather just go about other things and be left in peace.

What happens if I don't ask?

It is a phenomenon that on the one hand we intrinsically know how important questions are, and on the other hand we are true artists when it comes to avoiding them. Whether this happens with children, at school and in training, at work, in society or in our everyday lives. We contradict ourselves. We don't acknowledge our own inquisitiveness, underestimate our urges and the need for orientation both in the here-and-now and for tomorrow. We thus settle for our current state of knowledge, staying in the safe status quo. We may realize later on, in the case of climate change, too late or, as in the case of Trump or other populists, not at all that we are at a dead end.

The status quo is comfortable and should remain so, and we are doing everything we can to keep it that way. The horizon is wonderful. But why explore when it's so beautiful here?!

Who is affected if I don't ask questions (anymore)?

At first glance, it may not seem so bad if I don't ask any questions (anymore). After all, you may think, you as a reader of this book do not belong to the category of people just described. Really? Let's assume that you also find yourself in the description at least here and there - who is then affected by this dilemma of question-apaty?

It's not just the others - whoever "the others" are. First and foremost, we punish ourselves with it. We ourselves are affected - our children, our education system, our work, our society or our everyday life. Our own immediate environment is affected - our family and friends, our place of residence, our region, our country - as well as our environment. In short, we are all involved - only it seems that we don't always realize it.

This reminds me of the story about a frog and hot water. If we throw a frog into boiling water, it will do everything in its capability to get right back out of the pot. It recognizes the deadly danger and wants to escape from it immediately. In a second case, we put a frog in a pot of cold water and heat it slowly until it finally boils. Here the frog does not jump out of the water because it does not notice how the temperature slowly rises. The moment it feels that the water is too hot for it, it is already too late, and it dies.

Some change in today's world is rapid and we quickly become aware of it, want to react to it or duck away. The COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 is a good example. Within weeks, our familiar world was turned upside down. Nothing was the same anymore. The old normality just a memory. From then on, quarantine and social distancing shaped our daily lives. Public life and the economy came to a standstill. Companies that had been swimming along in the stream of fast money and had been successful for years found that their reserves were not enough, orders fell away, and they were insolvent within a few weeks. Small businesses and solo self-employed people were able to keep their heads above water in part with emergency government aid. But many had to throw in the towel, close their businesses or give up self-employment. The Covid 19 pandemic was a watershed. The old normal was history, a new normal developed in just a few weeks,

and change continues. What the world will look like a year from now, we cannot say. What is certain is the uncertainty about the future.

But change can also happen slowly and continuously. Take climate change, for example. It may be that we are not yet really aware of it in some regions of the world. But there is no doubt that it is happening. By the time climate change reaches more moderate regions such as Western Europe, it may already be too late to stop and avert it.

Honestly then, are we really that much smarter than the frog in the pot of water where the water is slowly heated?

Why do we so rarely ask questions?

I think the fact that we so rarely ask questions has something to do with our comfort in the first place. I don't want this to be understood as a devaluation, but rather as a recognition of reality. I myself find myself here far too often. And to a certain extent, there's not that much wrong with it. At least as long as it doesn't have a negative impact on me or others.

Another reason for our reluctance to ask questions, in my opinion, is that we are simply afraid to ask questions or possibly too many questions. It's the fear of being noticed or teased for asking a question and showing that we might have a gap in our knowledge. It's the fear of exposing oneself. And it may also be the fear of addressing uncomfortable things with questions that could either jeopardize the nice, comfortable status quo or hurt my fellow human being to whom I'm asking the question or expose him or her because he or she doesn't know the answer to the question. Related to this is our tendency to avoid questions because we may not have the answers and therefore don't want to address them, let alone ask them.

Last, but not least, we simply don't ask some questions because we don't know what question to ask or don't know that it would be important to ask questions.

Who doesn't ask questions, remains stupid

It's not as if we weren't encouraged to ask questions from an early age. The German TV show "Sesame Street" starts with: "Who, how, what? Why, how come, what?! If you don't ask, you stay stupid." Even today, I can see myself, my siblings and friends sitting in front of the TV and singing along to the song. And my parents, too, sang diligently along. "Sesame Street" itself then gives many good examples of how to ask questions and explains why it is so important to go through the world with an open mind and curiosity.

The song has been memorized. But the appeal and meaning behind it is too often caught up and undermined by reality. "No, don't ask too many questions! Trust the teacher, the supervisor, the company, the politicians, etc. They know better. They give us guidance and help us." What nonsense!

It's a shame that Sesame Street's motto "Who, like what? Why, how come, what?! If you don't ask, you stay stupid" has been left only as a memory. Yet it's a really good guide - both for school and for life. Not only for children, but for all of us! Questions are good advisors - especially in times of uncertainty and tremendous change and the search for orientation. Questions open up spaces for the accumulation of knowledge and the exchange of ideas and experiences. They help us to move from the passivity of not knowing into the activity of learning and thus shaping life.

Questions are not stupid or even dangerous. What is and becomes dangerous is when we stop asking questions and remain in the dark - precisely the opposite of what we want to do, especially in this day and age.

Today, questions are more important than ever - not only the simple questions of everyday life or questions to which we quickly find an answer, but also uncomfortable questions to which we do not yet have an answer. Or which stir up dust and move people - be it positively or negatively. Or they are questions that we have not dared

to ask for a long time. They are questions that move you in one way or another and are now slowly coming to light, as the time is ripe to ask them. Regardless of whether there is a quick answer or not.

We must not forget that questions usually open more rooms than they close. So why want to sit in the dark when questions can open doors to more light?

Then there are situations in which we definitely have answers to questions. Like the elderly couple in Davos, for example, who were initially afraid of the digital transformation. Their reasoning for their skepticism about digital change was coherent and understandable. This initially closed the question of digital transformation for them. Only the reformulation of the question “How will we live?” to “How do we want to live?” changed their perspective and opened up new horizons. Suddenly, spaces for other possibilities and ideas appeared, and the couple’s perspective on the digital transformation turned 180 degrees.

In short, the way we ask a question has a great influence on our answer and thus on our own horizon of understanding.

What's behind “reframing”?

For several years, I have been working as a consultant and coach in the innovative environment, be it with large corporations, medium-sized companies or start-ups. Whenever you seem to have reached a dead end and don't know what to do next, the technique of reformulating questions, known as reframing, has proven quite helpful. For example, if instead of asking, “What are the risks associated with a particular situation?“, we ask, “What opportunities and possibilities arise with a particular situation?”.

With reframing, we therefore turn questions upside down, so to speak, and consciously try to adopt a different perspective. It is initially irrelevant whether the new question makes sense or not.

The decisive factor is that the new question helps us to look at something from a different angle. This opens up new horizons and not infrequently results in new answers, ideas, solutions - or even new questions that one had not discovered before. My experience with the exercise of reframing can be illustrated with the following picture: We are in a cave with no visible exit. With the new questions, cracks appear in the rock and behind them a glimmer of light and a way out appears.

Reframing, however, is not limited to reformulating questions. It can also be used to see things from other perspectives. For example, if we are confronted with a seemingly unsolvable problem or find ourselves in a very awkward situation, the following questions can help us to look at the situation from a different perspective and find solutions.⁸¹

- What else is possible?
- What else can change?
- What about it could be good and right, even though I don't see it right now?
- What is the lie here?
- What did I do that caused the current situation? Did I do it intentionally?

How do I start asking?

Should you be afflicted by question-reluctance - how do you manage to get out of it? There are many possibilities.

The obvious option is to take a jolt and start with simple questions, be it with or at friends or in a professional environment. They don't have to be uncomfortable questions. Maybe you start with questions that you simply enjoy and have fun with. It's not so much about asking meaningful questions, but about asking questions on a whim and thus rediscovering your thirst for knowledge, your own curiosity and simply trying something new.

If you get stuck with certain questions, rephrase them. Turn them upside down, regardless of whether it makes sense at first or not. As I said, it's about letting the flow of questions flow again. This alone opens up spaces and possibilities.

Another option is to ask deliberately provocative questions that aim to wake people up or elicit unexpected answers. Say goodbye to the idea that you have to have an answer ready for every question. You don't. Instead of looking for the best answer, allow yourself to come up with as many, maybe even crazy, ideas as possible. The more, the better. Maybe the "right" answer is there, maybe not. What can come out of it in any case is that you allow yourself to be creative and let answers emerge.

If this is too abstract for you, observe what questions are asked in your everyday life. This can be in your private or professional life. Pay conscious attention to the question and whether and how it is answered. Talk shows are good examples. They thrive on good (and sometimes not so good) questions. For example, if a politician on a talk show tries to avoid answering a question, it may have been uncomfortable or provocative. Or he doesn't know the answer to the question, doesn't want to embarrass himself and therefore tries to avoid the question and its answer. Alternatively, there are talk shows to which guests like to come precisely because they know that no uncomfortable questions will be asked, or the talk show host knows how to create a pleasant and safe conversational atmosphere for the guest. What types of questions are asked here? Which ones are not?

Every one of us can ask questions. For, if children can ask an infinite number of questions, why shouldn't we as adults be able to do the same? We can't really unlearn it. Perhaps we are out of practice. Or we don't dare to ask, or we don't dare to openly express questions that are buzzing through our minds, or invite fellow human beings to join in asking questions and/or searching for answers. Having an inhibition or fear of asking questions has nothing to do with the fact that we have forgotten how to ask. Because even if we are afraid to ask questions, the questions are there.

If there really is such a situation where I don't want to blurt out my questions, I can always ask myself those questions and get going. I can make it a little challenge for myself and approach it playfully. Or I can observe if and which questions my environment asks, how the questions are asked, and what the reactions of others to the questions are.

Another way to reacquaint yourself with questions is to open a reference book and look very specifically for questions that are explored in that book. In what context are the questions asked? What do these questions do, or how are they attempted to be answered?

In short, finding questions is or should be the least of your problems. Asking them may possibly be a bit more difficult for one or the other. But if there are questions, why not accept them and let them serve their purpose, ask them and look for answers? Even if there are reasons not to do so, I think there are at least as many reasons to do it.



Questions as door openers

“It’s impossible,” Pride said.

“It’s risky,” said the experience.

“It doesn’t make sense,” the head said.

“Just try,” whispered the heart.

Found on Instagram, in reference to Erich Fried’s “What it is”.

Those who have questions and ask them open doors and spaces. They start a process of exchanging and finding ideas. They are thus a valuable and indispensable companion in the search for orientation for shaping our journey in the digital age. We will take a look at which search is meant by this in the following chapter.

Further exercises and questions

1. Collecting questions

For pure practice and fun, start collecting and asking lots of questions. One question may trigger another. Go with the flow. The more questions you collect, the better. Now look at the list of questions. Which questions stand out? How can you group the questions or maybe put them in order? Then, if you had a trigger, try to relate the questions to it. How do the questions help you? To what extent do they “serve” the trigger, or can they bring light into the darkness?

2. Reframing

- Write down three questions that come to mind spontaneously - be it in your private, professional or social environment. Then answer these questions. If you don't have an answer, write “I don't know”.

Now turn the question on its head and deliberately rephrase it. Instead of asking about problems, for example, ask what opportunities arise.

Try to answer this question as well.

Then compare the answers with each other.

- Spontaneously answer the question “How will I live in the future in view of the digital transformation?”

Now rephrase the question and answer the question “How do I want to live in the future?”

Now answer the question “How can I use technology to shape my future? Where can I start today?”

Compare your answers with each other. What do you recognize?

3. Good questions

- Sobel and Panas, in their book *Power Questions* (2012)⁸², discuss a total of 337 questions that help to critically examine one's perspective on life and work. Read through the questions and select a few for reframing. See how this leads to different answers or even new questions.
- Another book worth reading that is chock full of provocative questions is by Marc Lesser: *Know Yourself, Forget Yourself: Five Truths to Transform Your Work, Relationships, and Everyday Life*. (2013)
- 121 coaching questions can be found in a Litvin Group overview at https://static.mindvalley.com/public/assets/2019/08/121_Powerful_Questions_from_Evercoach.pdf.

5. In Search of Orientation

“The factual truth is in nature, happiness is not found at the summit, but within us.

When we are fully ourselves.”⁸³

Reinhold Messner

Key points

- We long for orientation, for safety and security, and then, instead of finding and creating them, do exactly the opposite.
- To be able to seek orientation, we need space and time to pause. We have to create this space for ourselves.
- The first step towards orientation is us. That is, orientation lies within us.
- The search for orientation is a journey that never ends. It opens horizons and holds treasures in the form of opportunities for discovery and innovation.
- The search for orientation can provide security, safety, and support; especially when we embark on the journey together with others.

What search?

I'll be honest: As much as I'm excited about digitization and as much as I see or feel the many possibilities and opportunities it offers, there are times when I'm simply surprised and sometimes even overwhelmed by all the rapid change. Something that was all the rage, or the latest development or invention today is already obsolete tomorrow. So, it's no wonder that I, and maybe you, too, are asking where it's all going and what role I still play in it or what place I can still occupy in it.

It's an uneasy feeling of disorientation - not exactly helpful in times of rapid change. So, I go in search of orientation, of goals, of something that will help me master and shape everyday life.

Work is such an orientation for many. Or should we say, work is a distraction from the chaos out there? What about family and friends? To what extent do family, friends and work provide orientation for this time, and to what extent are they perhaps only distractions?

I maintain that in many cases they are more like distractions. There is not necessarily anything wrong with that. Many of our fellow human beings feel very comfortable with this kind of distraction. They don't thirst for new questions and answers, because their immediate environment gives them a degree of security and safety.

“Hitting the wall at 200 km/h”

And yet I believe that deep within us humans there is always a desire for orientation, for a compass. The digital age is showing itself in changes at a speed never experienced before. Whereas the 20th century was characterized by relatively stable systems in which predictions were more possible, today we are confronted by a great unknown that we cannot really grasp.

In a way, it's a contradiction. On the one hand, we are increasingly driving change ourselves. On the other hand, we often lack orientation. No one can really say where all this is going. Figuratively speaking, we are driving at 200 km/hr into a wall of fog. So far, everything has gone well. But we don't know if other cars or even a wall will suddenly appear out of the fog. The moment we realize this, it is usually too late, and we drive at full speed into the end of a traffic jam.

We long for orientation, for safety and security, and then do exactly the opposite instead of finding and creating them. Why is that? What does it take for us to uncover this contradiction and resolve it? When is the right time for this?

When I look at the crises in our world, starting with the increasingly uncontrollable climate change and its associated effects, the answer can only be “immediately” and “always”. The problem is that we do not allow ourselves the time to ask questions and go in search of them. In times of ever faster and more opaque changes, there is no point in doing everything even faster.

Create free space for orientation

What is needed is space and time to pause. And this is anything but easy in the hectic pace of everyday life. The hectic pace alone will not give us this space and time. It does the opposite. It sucks up the last free spaces of our free time, turning us into externally driven people.

Buddhist wisdom says, “If you are in a hurry, go slowly. “ This is by no means a paradox that cannot be resolved. Rather, it is an appeal not to lose track of what we are doing in all the hustle and bustle. Otherwise, we will really be racing at full speed into a wall of fog - with an uncertain outcome.

We are world champions at planning. In fact, we often schedule our entire day. But instead of finding peace through this, we cause stress with our schedules. In other words, exactly the opposite of what we intended. What is not in the plan does not exist. Time to pause, reflect or rest? Sounds good to me. But if it's not in the plan, it doesn't happen.

Planning is good, as long as it does not restrict our orientation or creativity. And as long as it doesn't have the opposite effect of its actual intention - which is security and peace of mind.

If we can't find the time or space in our busy day to simply pause, reflect or relax, well, then we must schedule that time and space. In this way, we beat stubborn planning by beating it at its own game. We create our own free space. That is a first step.

The second step is to enter this new space. Not to slam the door or the window to this room again right away or to have it bricked up by others. When we finally enter this room, it may not yet be familiar to us and we must first orient ourselves.

First steps towards orientation: the discovery of ourselves

There is no fixed agenda for this orientation and exploration of space. We must start with ourselves, for example by coming to rest and taking a breath first. After all, this space is also an oasis within the hustle and bustle of everyday life. And the beauty of this self-created free space is that we can design it ourselves.

It is up to us to create this free space, to firmly plan for it, to enter it and to shape it. As difficult as it can be to create it, it is just as easy to be pulled out again by everyday life. It may be that one fills up the free space with the hustle and bustle and stress of the outside world, which one wants to escape. Or it may be that one is prevented from entering it at all. In the working world, for example, this can be the flood of meetings or the expectations of others - be it those of the supervisor or the other employees.

Staying true to yourself in such situations and not leaving the newly created space is not necessarily easy. This makes it all the more important to remember why you created this space and what goals you are pursuing with it. If I let myself be pulled back into the daily grind right at the first resistance, at the first difficulty, either the goals were not really convincing and gripping, or the pain of the daily grind was not great enough.

Resistance and distractions are inevitable. The question is how we want to deal with it, if and how we react. It is not easy. We search for orientation, find little or no time to deal with the questions that move us. That's why we schedule space and time, enter that space, quickly realizing that the answers we seek are not handed to us on a silver platter. Instead, the room that is supposed to bring us orientation is empty at first. It's no wonder that we are initially confused, frustrated, and skeptical, leaving us vulnerable to being pulled back into the same old rut. The space that is supposed to help us get our bearings is empty. What a disappointment!

Yet this is a fallacy. After all, we are in this space. To what extent we fill it is another question that will be examined in more detail later in this book. The fact is only that we are in this free space of orientation. But if the space is

empty and we are the only ones in this space, we ourselves are the first step to orientation. In other words, the first step to orientation is us. That is, the orientation is within us!

Incidentally, it is not at all unlikely that you will be viewed skeptically by your own peers. Who knows, maybe one or the other already whispers something about you. Not very pleasant. In itself, you want to belong to the others, to swim with the current. Going my own way now is not only antisocial towards my colleagues and fellow human beings, but it even isolates me. The temptation to return to the warm nest right at the beginning of the search for orientation is real. And it is already very strong.

This is the moment when we want to be true to ourselves. What are the reasons why we entered the room? If they have been real and have driven us, they cannot possibly turn out to be made-up. Those who are so easily swayed from their travel intentions remain trapped.

Do we live in an illusory world of our own making?

In the 1998 Hollywood film *The Truman Show*, the central character of the film, Truman Burbank, grows up in a safe environment. He doesn't know that his world is actually a huge film studio where his fellow human beings are actors or extras and he himself, unasked, takes the leading role. He knows no other world, feels safe and comfortable - until one day a spotlight falls from the artificial sky and he starts to wonder. Truman starts asking questions, wants to explore the boundaries of his home and go beyond. His fellow humans are not simply concerned. They panic because, after all, Truman must be kept in the show, in the art world. Without his unconscious playing along, they lose their *raison d'être*. So, they try everything to appease Truman's doubts and to make his questions look like errors.

At first, these diversionary tactics work and life in the Truman world goes on as usual. Meanwhile, the fire of curiosity in Truman is ignited. Without knowing what is beyond the horizon, he wants to explore it, no matter the cost. He no longer allows himself to be distracted by those around him. He even leaves his wife to pursue his questions. His urge and desire for answers and orientation grows from day to day. In the end, he is willing to give his life for it - testing the limits of his world and his own. Until he finally hits the outer wall of the film studio and discovers a door to the "other" world. *The Truman Show* was thus history. And at the same time, the end was the beginning of a new life for him.

Are we perhaps also living in a kind of *Truman Show*? What prevents us from exploring our own limits and horizons? If we are not overwhelmed with our own questions and perish under them, we have to pick ourselves up and look for a new orientation, even if this may involve resistance, unknowns, dangers and injuries. Only, if we know this, what are we waiting for?

It is up to us, like Truman, to take up the search for orientation and for answers to our questions. Be it alone or with others. The opinion of others can be like a burden to us, hindering our search more than helping it. Or

it can motivate, promote and encourage us. We will find out only when we take the first step. If we really want to change something in ourselves and our environment, this is inevitable. There are certainly role models for this. And it is worthwhile to follow role models. Because that's how we can really make a difference in a community.

In 2010, Derek Sivers explained in a TED talk⁸⁴ how to start a movement. For this, he showed and commented on a video in which a man stood up in the middle of a group of people enjoying the sunny day on a meadow and started dancing like crazy. At first, he was viewed by only a few people. Eventually, a second man joined him and danced along. A short time later, more people joined in, until finally more or less all the people who were enjoying the silence before were in the middle of the dance.

Sivers explained that it didn't really depend so much on the man at the beginning to start this movement. Sure, it certainly took courage to take off the T-shirt and start dancing. What mattered was the second man following the first in the dance, encouraging others to do the same. Sivers: "If you really care about starting a movement, have the courage to follow and show others how to follow. And when you find a lone nut doing something great, have the guts to be the first one to stand up and join in."⁸⁵

Greta Thunberg⁸⁶, the young climate activist from Sweden, is a wonderful example of this. Initially, she went on strike alone every Friday at her school and demonstrated in front of the Swedish parliament for a sustainable climate policy. In the meantime, the "school strike for the climate" she initiated has given rise to the global "Fridays for Future" movement.

Safety, security and support through the search for orientation

The moment others join my quest, the quest takes on a new momentum. Not only do I feel better, I feel supported. I feel relieved, a pressure falls away and I as well as the others get into a flow. The more people get into the dance, the more I become a part of the dance myself. I am no longer a lonely dancer but become part of the dance. The dance dances me and I dance it. At a certain point, the group takes on a certain size and dynamic, it becomes a self-runner. The outcome of the dance is still uncertain. And yet something fundamental has changed in the development. Even though I may still be searching for orientation, not yet thinking I have found it, I have found something that I originally gave up for the search and now get back many times over: the feeling of safety, security and support. In other words, the search for orientation itself can give me security, safety and support.

This also means that the excuse of not wanting to ask questions because we would have to give up safety, security and support is a cheap excuse without basis. The search for orientation does not take away our sense of security, safety and support. It gives it to us. Especially when we participate in it with others. Derek Sivers' dance video is a good example. The orientation for the dance does not lie with the individual dancers, but in the dynamic that brings the individual dancers together to form a whole, a dancing movement. This does not follow a fixed plan that can be drawn up in advance. Rather, it unfolds through its own dynamics. It does not need any organization from the outside.

The common denominator of the search for orientation allows the group to organize itself. Whereby this organization is not a rigid structure or a machine, but rather resembles a living being or a huge flock of birds that forms something new every second. Meanwhile, the flock of birds is far from chaos, but forms a whole, even if this whole is constantly in motion and always recreating itself.



Flock of birds at dusk. (©James Wainscoat on Unsplash)

Whether and how it continues after the end of the film *The Truman Show*, with the dancing or the flock of birds, remains open to interpretation.

- Truman's life in the film of the same name is certainly not over. How it continues is not in the script. Nor does it have to be.
- Maybe the dancing movement will turn into a huge party or maybe not.
- The flock of birds dissolves again when it has found a new home and the individual birds build their own nests and raise offspring - only to form a new flock of birds a few months later and begin a new journey.

After the trip is before the trip. What remains the same are the protagonists: us. And therein lies, on the one hand, a security, safety and support for our journey - and, on the other hand, in ourselves and in human interaction lies a huge potential for discoveries, experiences and innovations. Provided, of course, that we allow ourselves to become involved. And provided we don't let outdated social and behavioral norms prevent us from doing so, as we will see in the next chapter.

6. Boys Don't Cry - Men Do!

*"Defining myself
is like confining myself
so I un-defined myself
to find myself"*
IN-Q, American poet

Key points

- Social norms of behavior can give us stability and orientation. However, sometimes, norms like "Boys don't cry! " are outdated nonsense.
- Seen more deeply, crying is not only the expression of feelings, but also a call for care, help and security.
- The power of habits keeps us from questioning the old and seeking the new.
- If I suppress my emotions, I deceive myself and give up an important element of my humanity.
- Emotions caused by a sense of vulnerability, helplessness or disorientation are anything but artificial. They are something deeply human. It's just that they don't seem to fit into our world. By trying to suppress them, we suppress something fundamentally human about us.
- When men cry, it often doesn't fit into our image of the perfect, controlled world. But what if this image has long been outdated and crying does fit into this image?
- We find it uncomfortable to see other people cry because we are reminded of our own humanity and so we sympathize out of compassion.
- To reduce the risk of burnout at work, it is recommended that managers care to ensure that all employees are treated fairly, that the workload is manageable, that roles and responsibilities are clear, that communication is transparent and open, and that unnecessary time pressure is avoided.
- In the world of digitization, plannability doesn't really exist.
- With our control-mania, we have created a world that is less and less controllable.
- The competition between "human vs. technical resources" is becoming increasingly fierce. For reasons of cost and efficiency, the resource machine is winning more and more often. As long as we view, behave and treat each other as human resources rather than as people, the situation is more likely to worsen than to ease.

Boys don't cry

From an early age, I learned that as a boy, it was not appropriate to show weakness, express your emotions, or even cry. It was frowned upon; you were laughed at. So, over the years I built a kind of protective armor around myself. My emotions belonged to me. Yes, there were times, many times, when I felt sad and despairing and I didn't dare talk about it, let alone express it. I "controlled" my emotions, kept them in check.

In retrospect, I understand that this controlling taught me to put away many disappointments, process them, cope with them, and then look forward. Instead of letting myself down, I developed the basic attitude of "now more than ever." Not stubbornness or obsession, but resilience, perseverance, goal and result orientation. These were and are indeed good and strong virtues. They helped and still help me to achieve many things in my life.

On the other hand, the armor of control and protection around me caused something in me to wither away. Something very, very precious: my naturalness.

Emotions are nothing to be ashamed of. They are something fundamentally human. If I try to suppress or control them, I also suppress the humanity, the naturalness in me. What remains has nothing to do with authenticity, but rather something to do with an artificial role.

That's why the traditional social norm "boys don't cry" is absolute nonsense. And it leads us in the completely wrong direction. Controlling emotions, human emotions and outbursts by taking away their space does not lead to a masculine and strong personality, but rather to a cold and mechanical role.

Showing vulnerability is therefore not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of being human, of naturalness and therefore a sign of strength. And it is an expression of maturity. Hence the headline "Boys don't cry - men do!"

One man, one guy. One woman, one guy?

Although the saying "boys don't cry" initially refers to boys and men, it would be too short-sighted to talk only about men. Equally silly and misleading is the belief that girls should not throw tantrums or shout and should always be "nice and sweet". Both sayings are based on beliefs from past centuries. From times when the woman was much less "valuable" than the man. These beliefs must become a thing of the past.

On paper, they have done so in most societies. Unfortunately, the reality still looks different. For example, women still earn less than men on average and find it much more difficult to move up the corporate ladder. As a result, today's economy and society are still very much dominated by men.

To conclude from this that only men are to blame is misleading. After all, today's system is supported by both men and women. And many women believe or are forced to behave like men in order to have opportunities and move up. Humanity and emotions have no place in a Tayloristic world. If they do, they have very little value and then often the goal is to increase a company's profits.

That's why we can confidently change the saying "boys don't cry" to "guys don't cry". Because guys can be both boys and girls, men and women.

Vulnerability is not a sign of weakness.

It is a sign of being human.

It is a sign of strength.

Why do we suppress emotions?

I don't think there is anything bad or evil in crying. Historically, it was the boys, the men, who were simply expected to be strong, to have their emotions under control, to control them. This included not crying. Because crying is an expression of emotions. But in doing so, one shows a human characteristic, shows one's vulnerable side. It becomes clear that one is afraid, for example, or has hurt oneself and it hurts. Here, crying is a way of getting attention and asking for help from the outside. One wants to be heard, be comforted or get support. So, crying is not only the expression of feelings, but also a call for care, for help and security.

Then there are situations in which one cries out of compassion or also out of grief. One suffers, feels pain, gives free rein to one's emotions and the tears flow. After crying, you feel exhausted, sometimes relieved, you feel that you have expressed something.

Crying from joy, the tears of joy, is similar. Tears do not come up out of pain or suffering but are triggered by a very positive experience.

It's strange that joy and sorrow can be so close together, at least when it comes to crying. Here, too, it is not uncommon to be ashamed of one's tears, to quickly wipe them away. You don't want to be seen with tears in your eyes. You simply show too much of yourself, which does not fit into the role you are playing or what is expected of you. So, it is better not to show tears and emotions and stick to your role. Not because it is better than emotions and their expression, but because the role play "strong man" also gives something like safety, security and orientation. Tears have no place here. This is the only way we can hold our own in today's society. Emotions are only a distraction. After all, in a society that is complicated enough and full of challenges, who wants to show weakness, to admit that they may not have the answers to questions? There is simply no room for emotions. How could there be? We are busy enough with controlling reality. Emotions don't really help, especially since it's about creating safety and security. We help ourselves. We don't need any help from outside, no one to mother and comfort us. We can do it on our own.

Why is it so hard to break out?

Above, I asked the question why we should change something that has always been true. After all, it is passed down through generations. So, it must also be good and have stood the test of time. Because otherwise it wouldn't last so long.

The power of habit keeps us from questioning the old and looking for the new. Especially when it comes to the fact that the opposite - that is, to cry and show emotions - is seen as weakness. To assert and live the opposite requires energy and courage. But who wants to muster courage and be seen as weak by others? Especially when this could be mercilessly exploited by others and you can only lose. In that case, it's better to shut up, close your eyes and swallow your emotions. Apart from this, as an adult you are quite secure, you know how to help yourself, you have become "something". Again, weakness and vulnerability don't really get you anywhere in this world. They have no place.

Good for competition

And indeed, I admit that the saying “Boys don’t cry!” has also had a positive influence on me. It was not unusual for me to hold back my tears, pull myself together, look for solutions, and fight. As a result, the trigger for the emotions was quickly forgotten. The success proved me right.

However, it would be presumptuous to claim that the belief that “boys don’t cry” was decisive in my professional success, for example. The fact is that the belief system contributed to the fact that as an adolescent I did not infrequently suppress tears and then successfully fought my way through certain situations. So over time I got into a certain rut, learned to stand my ground, not to give in to my emotions. And when I did feel my emotions, I managed to control them quickly. Or to distract myself somehow, knowing that the emotions would go away. So, I developed not only tenacity, resilience, the ability to stand my ground, but also to deal with difficult “emotional” situations. Admittedly, these are not necessarily bad qualities for life in today’s world.

At the same time, it was not always easy to control my emotions, sometimes even to suppress them. That required energy and stamina. My coat became thicker as a result, I didn’t get distracted so quickly, was more controlled, and went my own way.

What sacrifices are made?

But as nice as it may be to have acquired a thick skin over the years, it's not like I haven't paid a price for it at all. On the one hand, control over one's own emotions is useful; on the other hand, it contributes to dulling one's emotions. Suppressing one's own emotions always means suppressing a part of oneself. After all, emotions are something natural and very personal. To simply demonize them would mean that you demonize yourself as well. And who wants that? I certainly don't.

Just because I've learned not to cry doesn't mean my emotions no longer exist. Of course, they are still there. Deep inside. It's just that I have them "under control" - either because I distract myself from them with my behavior or other thoughts, or because I simply swallow them. But once again: I have swallowed a part of my humanity. I cannot eliminate them. And if I'm honest, they sometimes weigh heavily on my stomach. In such situations, my best medicine was to distract myself. Be it in my hobbies, my behavior, excuses or lies that no emotions were there. They were just figments of my imagination, they weren't real.

In doing so, I am first and foremost deceiving and harming myself. Emotions caused by a feeling of vulnerability, helplessness or disorientation are anything but artificial. They are something deeply human. It's just that they don't seem to fit into my world. By trying to suppress them, I suppress something fundamentally human in me. Not only do I distance myself from my own humanity, I distance myself more and more from it, become something else, become more of a functioning something or role. There is no trace of natural authenticity anymore. Perhaps I can even play something to my fellow human beings and deceive them. I become an actor instead of simply being myself. Actually, it's a great pity. Especially since this role-playing devours enormous reserves of strength and energy without really fulfilling me on the inside. The recognition I get from it usually fizzles out quickly. It is not sustainable. So, from the outside I become a shell of bliss. Inside, there is rather emptiness or quite a mess, because I am busy bringing the various emotions, the human, into order and controlling it so that it fits the outer shell.

Yes, this works quite often and yet it is not really satisfying. Even more important, the actual questions or the inner insecurity and the call for help, support and orientation do not go away from now on. They want to be heard.

I am not only hurting myself with this behavior. I also hurt my environment. My family, my friends, my society. I am playing a role that has nothing to do with me at all. As mentioned above, some may be fooled by this. But sometimes it comes out and then the surprise is big, and it comes to arguments, discussions and possibly to a separation.

Is this the behavior we want to model for our children? Can we still be role models for them like this? Do we want to be this kind of role model? Kind of hard for me to imagine. Or do we want our children to follow in those footsteps and then, when they are our age, feel exactly the way we do today? How do we want our children to feel when they are as old as we are now?

If we are in tune with ourselves and believe we can provide clear direction for the future, then all well and good. But I find it hard to imagine that there are so many of us to whom that would apply. I certainly don't count myself among them.

And yet we fall into the old traps again and again. When a child or even a fellow adult cries, shows emotion or is overwhelmed by his or her emotions - how often do we try to soothe, comfort and bring them back into the "normal" world? Most of us find it difficult to see fellow human beings, young or old, crying. We immediately ask what is wrong, want to help. Help in which direction?

Why is it so difficult for us to see people who show their feelings? Especially when they are men? When men cry, it often doesn't fit into our image of an ideal, controlled world. But what if this image has long been outdated, is a deception, and crying does fit into this image?

I argue that we find it so hard to see other people cry because we are reminded of our own humanity and so we sympathize out of compassion. It's an unfamiliar and uncomfortable situation because it makes you feel weak and vulnerable. Not good, because I don't know how to get out of it. Because there is a pain there that I don't even know how to grasp.

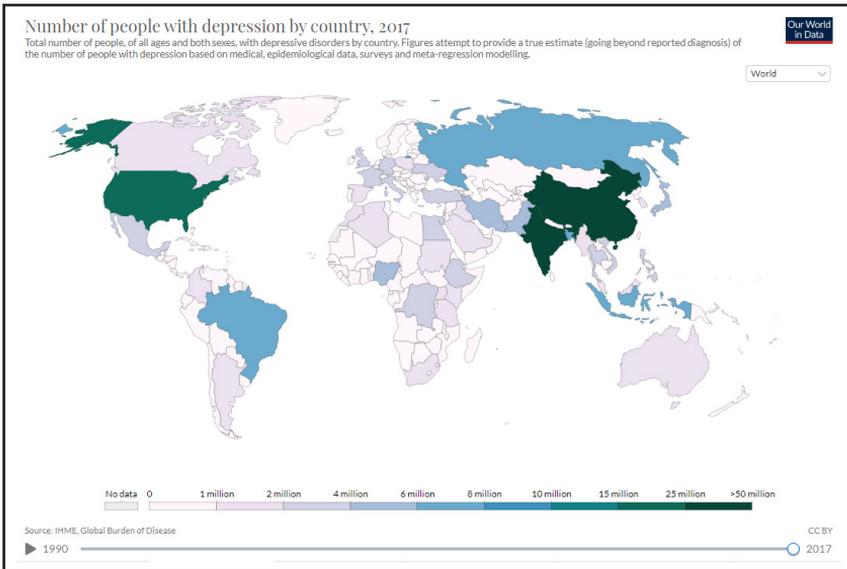
Let's remember that crying is first an expression of emotion. Whether and to what extent we want to be heard by others is another question. I believe that this is very often the case, at least in the subconscious. Only if this is so, however, I do not want to make the crying of a fellow human being stop as quickly as possible or to suppress it, but to listen first and thus also give the emotions the chance to articulate themselves except through tears. If this is possible.

Suppressing crying just because "you" do it that way may help in the short term and block the symptoms. But it is ultimately an escape from reality.

Ways to depression

Let's face it: it's frightening and tragic how little room there is for emotions in our controlled world. Tragic in the sense that the number of people suffering from depression and burnout has increased rapidly. Only, how can this be? Don't the professional world and society give us security and safety and thus contribute to inner fulfillment? The numbers say otherwise.

In Germany alone, the number of people suffering from depression has doubled since the turn of the millennium. Mental illnesses such as depression or burnout are now the third most common cause of incapacity to work in Germany. In Europe⁸⁷, an average of 5.3% of men and 8.8% of women suffered from depression in 2014. Worldwide, more than 264 million people (3.4 % of the global population in 2017) suffered from depression.⁸⁸ And the number is growing.⁸⁹ In other words, it is not a regional phenomenon but a global public health issue. This is illustrated in the following graphic:



Depression. A global health issue⁹⁰

According to a Gallup study, as many as 67% of employees suffer from mild to severe burnout at work.⁹¹ Even more tragically, illnesses such as depression and burnout may be recognized by health insurers but are not really taken seriously by the general public and are often laughed at. In this respect, the number of unreported cases of the working population suffering from mental illnesses could well be higher.⁹² It simply does not fit into the picture when a person in his mid-twenties already suffers from burnout or depression and is absent from work for days or weeks.

Interestingly, the main reasons for burnout are not so much the expectations of hard work or performance, but rather the way employees are treated. To reduce the risk of burnout at work, Wigert and Agrawal (2018) recommend that managers should care about treating all employees fairly, manageable workloads, clear roles and responsibilities, transparent and open communication, and avoiding unnecessary time pressure.⁹³

The human being as a resource

It is true that many companies say that their employees are their most important assets. At the same time, they are viewed and treated only as a resource. It is not without reason that we speak of “human resources”. And resources have to function. I can shape the environment in such a way that I can get the most out of this resource.

The only problem is that we humans are not really resources - even though we far too often behave and want to be treated exactly like that. We are humans and not machines.⁹⁴

A look at the statistics on how happy employees in the Western world are with their jobs shows that the value doesn't quite match up with the pretended ideal working world. According to a 2017 Gallup study, only 13% of employees worldwide are engaged in their job, meaning they are fully focused and passionate about it.⁹⁵ The vast majority are not engaged at work. Neither do people get personally absorbed in their work, nor do they invest extra energy or passion in their work. 18% are even actively disengaged and unhappy. They drain energy from others by making work hell, especially for engaged employees, or by flaunting their chronic dissatisfaction. Other studies⁹⁶ confirm these figures with only a few variations.

From this point of view, the increasing incidence of depression and burnout is not really surprising. It is rather a confirmation. It is not good; it is indeed tragic. And it's completely unnecessary. Only, what do we do about it?

Unfortunately, we continue to try to control the situation rather than solve the root causes. For this, we use conventional tools and approaches. But they do not really help. How could they, especially since they themselves have contributed to this misery. Why don't we take this dilemma as an opportunity to ask what drives us every day? Do we do something of our own accord and for our own good or to serve processes and machines? What's more important?

The illusion of control

We are used to controlling and shaping uncertain situations as quickly as possible. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this. But the approach reaches a limit when the previous tools no longer help because they require preconditions that no longer exist. One of these prerequisites is a present and future that can be planned for and controlled.

In the world of digitization, you can't really plan. There may still be many areas that I can control, where I can say how they will develop over the next ten, twenty or thirty years. It's just that the areas to which this does not apply are increasing. Sectors such as the automotive or energy industries, which were considered crisis-proof just five years ago, are already facing huge upheaval today and may be on the brink of extinction tomorrow. What is certain is that so-called crisis-proof, safe industries are anything but safe. Talking about control in such a situation shows ignorance and a loss of reality.

With our control-mania, we have created a world that is less and less controllable. Previous tools increasingly reach their limits or complicate the situation more than they would help to relax it.

If we continue to regard people as resources and treat them as such, it should not be surprising if resources are replaced by other resources. Even if these are possibly machines. That this scenario is already in the minds of many is not surprising. And yet it is suppressed, and people rely on old tools and approaches. Either one is stupid and out of touch with reality or the pain is not yet great enough. I just ask myself how big the pain has to become so that one reacts and rethinks - if it is not already too late and the damage is irreversible.

Worsening of the crisis

I began the chapter with the saying, “Boys don’t cry”. I myself have heard it many times. Yes, it has shaped me like many others. We have learned to control our emotions better and to function without them. This has brought many benefits and has worked wonderfully for decades and centuries. Only, where there is light, there is shadow. Now that we live in a time that is no longer as controllable as the past, we are reaching limits if we continue to raise people to be functioning beings and treat them as such. The number of people suffering from depression and burnout or simply unfulfilled in their jobs is increasing. At the same time, more and more machines are taking over the work of us humans. The competition of human vs. technical resources is becoming fiercer. For reasons of cost and efficiency, the machine resource is winning more and more often. This is bitter, and yet we ourselves have helped to create this situation. As long as we regard, behave and treat ourselves as human resources and not as human beings, the situation is more likely to worsen than to ease.

As outdated, obsolete and misleading as the belief that “boys don’t cry” is, so is the Tayloristic approach to business of viewing society as a hodgepodge of machines that can be controlled and planned. Anyone who puts people on the same level as machines should not be surprised if there is little or no place for them in the answer to the question “How will we live in the future?” There will be little or perhaps no room for us humans.

But what if we rephrase the question and ask: “How do we want to live?” And how about taking questions of humanity into our consideration and questioning or even mothballing old beliefs?

Further questions

- When was the last time you cried? How did you feel afterwards?
- When was the last time you suppressed the urge to cry? How did you feel about it and afterwards?
- Ask yourself where you treat your fellow human beings and where you treat yourself like a resource. What would change if you treated that human resource as a human being? What is stopping you?
- Check out the film “The Quiet Revolution” by Kristian Gründling. <https://www.die-stille-revolution.de>

7. Playing

“Man is only fully human where he plays.”
Friedrich Schiller

Key points

- We are born with a natural urge to play and learn.
- Openness, curiosity, presence and joy are elements of generative learning. We bring these elements with us by nature.
- The special thing about learning through play is that it is characterized by lightness, openness and joy. The lightness and the holistic learning with mind, body and heart make playing and thus also learning special.
- At school, we forget how to reconcile playing and learning. What is required first and foremost is mental performance, not joy and fun. In schools, holistic learning is promoted and demanded little or rarely.
- Those who suppress the urge to play and thus the urge to explore, prevent achievement and harm the shaping of their own living space.
- Learning always has something to do with personal responsibility. This is true for children as well as for adults.
- Openness, curiosity and presence open the door to perceived joy. It is the playful action that nurtures fun and joy.
- Generative learning is needed to create the VUCA world for us.
- Collaborative learning enables co-creation and creates new learning and living spaces.
- Prerequisites for generative learning are stable, yet adaptive structures, rules and processes that contribute to a safe environment and enable learning and continuous development.
- Digitization is a game-changer and tool for both exploring and shaping our own world.
- The challenges of the VUCA world are not so much problems as invitations to rediscover, develop and live out our innate, generative urge to learn and play.

Why play?

Children and playing, they simply belong together. When I ask friends and colleagues what they associate with games, the answer is usually “children”.

Children love to play, and we adults support them in doing so. We furnish the children’s rooms, buy toys, take the children to the playground, play with them or build open spaces where our children can let off steam. The fact that children (want to) play is the most natural thing in the world. They have a natural drive to play and at the same time an urge to explore. Play is about fun and joy. And play creates an environment of exploration and learning at the same time.

The special thing about children playing is that it is associated with ease, with joy and curiosity. Children love to be absorbed in play. In play, they enter another world, they are in the here-and-now. They open their senses, shut out the outside world. The universe of play seems to be timeless and boundless. It enables children to immerse themselves in their play, to block out everything else and to live in the moment.

Play is extremely important for children’s development. This is where they learn important skills and abilities - whether mental, physical or emotional. In playing with other children, they acquire important skills for their later social behavior. So, reducing play to just playing would be too short-sighted. Playing is much more. Above all, it is a huge and exciting learning space that children wonderfully embrace, explore and fill.

The special thing about learning through play is that it is characterized by lightness, openness and joy. Because the whole body and all the senses are often challenged and encouraged, it is a holistic learning. This makes learning deeper and more sustainable. This is not a contradiction to lightness. On the contrary, the lightness, openness and holistic learning with mind, body and heart make play and thus learning special. They make “generative learning” possible. Generative because children do not just passively perceive a play situation, but can also contribute

their previous knowledge, skills and abilities. They actively deal with the play situation, become active themselves. This has the effect that new knowledge as well as new abilities and skills can emerge.⁹⁷ The key to generative learning is not the passive absorption of knowledge, but the independent, active doing and trying out. Play, ease and openness to new things reinforce this. That is why playing is so important and valuable. But we often unlearn how to play. When does this happen?

The learning environment changes at the latest when children start school. The children's urge to move is tamed. They learn to sit still and quietly in chairs, to listen to the teachers. They train their minds and are prepared for life "outside".

It is true that teaching and pedagogical concepts in elementary schools have changed in recent decades and are more closely oriented to the needs and developmental stage of children. And yet, the reality is that there is rarely the space needed to create a holistic learning environment.

If children cannot stand to sit quietly in their chairs, they are unfortunately all too often referred to as "fidgeters" or have attention deficits. The administration of appropriate medication alleviates this "illness" and calms the children. But children often only show their natural urges.

Sometimes it reminds me more of a flea circus, where the fleas are conditioned in a short time to stop jumping. They unlearn one of their basic skills. In school, we tend to unlearn generative learning, that is, we unlearn how to balance play and learning. What is required first and foremost is mental performance. There is still time and space to play. But it is more like playing in the head. Time for sports, artistic or musical activities, for example, is increasingly being sacrificed to other learning material and the lack of time.

I admit that this is a rather simple representation and perhaps exaggerated. Reality is not black and white. The basic tenor, however, remains that little to rarely holistic, let alone generative, learning is encouraged and required in schools. This is not to say that children don't learn. They do. And more and more, as the subject matter

increases along with society's knowledge. To conclude that more learning automatically means that the time originally reserved for certain curricular content must become shorter and shorter, and that curricula must become more comprehensive year after year, is questionable. Rather, it leads to students having even less time for other, non-intellectual activities, and to an increase in learning stress, not necessarily learning effectiveness. Time and open spaces for play, unwinding, reflection, and recreation become smaller. They compete with purpose-driven learning and, unfortunately, often get the short end of the stick. There is no question that we learn a lot in schools and acquire a lot of knowledge. At the same time, we often unlearn how to play.

This is a significant and lasting loss. Because with it we often unlearn much more. Play is associated with ease, fun and joy, and a natural curiosity that is not always purpose-driven, but open and exploratory. Of course, this can also be experienced in more traditional, one-dimensional learning. But whether this is true for all children is another matter.

One of the biggest sacrifices we make when we can no longer play is to no longer be in the here-and-now. It is one of the outstanding features of young children's play that makes play and learning so special. In school, we learn to focus on the subject matter. At the same time, distractions are increasing. Concentration wanders. Adolescents are drawn into the maelstrom of the hectic pace of everyday life at an early age and have to find their way around. There is no longer room for pausing and being in the here-and-now. This is a pity and a tragedy, because we lose something very precious about ourselves. Namely, the inherent human ability and skill to be in the boundless and seemingly timeless here and now. We trade it in for hecticness and being driven, but fortunately we get many tools to do so. Time and space for play are decreasing more and more. Instead, we learn to function. And in the end, we do that quite well.



What happens when you invite adults to play?

So, it is not surprising that we adults react rather hesitantly and sometimes even with resistance when we are invited to play. Admittedly, it is easier to play in our free time. But at work, this is hardly feasible. There's a fear of exposing oneself. "Oh God, you could lose and look like a fool. How embarrassing. Better not, and maybe just watch."

It is interesting to observe that we adults very often, too often, associate playing with competition. Why is that? Where has the urge to play, to play for the sake of playing, gone?

We often seem to have lost the urge to play or it has become noticeably smaller over the years. However, I doubt that this urge to play can die off completely. When I offer exercises in coaching or workshops that are games in themselves, but I do not announce them as games, the participants usually do not hesitate or hardly hesitate to participate. It is also not necessary to explain in advance that something new is now to be learned through a game. In fact, I wouldn't do it either because many participants have unlearned learning through play. In the world of planning, control and process optimization, there is no room for this. When the participants later realize that they have "only" played and thus achieved great learning successes, they are often surprised. And, oh God, they may even have had something like fun and enjoyment in the process, which may no longer have any place or be allowed to have any place at all in the normal everyday working world.

I have also discovered similar things in my free time. As a ski instructor, I like to incorporate games into my "lessons". If I explain in advance that we are going to play a game, you can almost feel the tension in the group. The learning success and the fun are limited. If I don't talk about games, but about exercises, things look different. Often it is only afterwards that the participants realize that they have really "only" been playing. And the more pronounced the game character, the greater the learning success. This may also be because games appeal to all the senses and involve the mind, body and heart. It is a kind of return to childlike play and thus to holistic and more sustainable learning experiences.

And playing doesn't always have to have anything to do with serious learning. A few years ago, my wife organized a surprise party for my birthday. It was a very special party because my wife planned it as a child's birthday party. It included everything from pot banging to absorbent cotton blowing, appropriate table decorations and of course children's songs. We had a lot of fun and joy. And yet, I admit that I could never quite let go while playing and couldn't give myself over completely to the fun and games for at least a few hours or at least minutes. My head just wouldn't go along with it. As much as that birthday party was just awesome, it still saddens me today that I couldn't let go then and was trapped in my head.

On the other hand, with other activities, such as skiing, climbing or tango dancing I can let go wonderfully and enjoy the moment, be in the here-and-now and block out everything else. Not always, but quite often. The nice side effect of letting go and being in the here-and-now is relaxation, fun and joy.

Now the question: if we feel so good playing games per se, why don't we do it more often? The most common answer might be that you don't have time to play. Or it doesn't fit into the environment of work, for example. Or one is no longer used to creating and filling time and space for it.



What are our “playgrounds” (becoming)?

Our playgrounds⁹⁸ are far too often called work, daily routine, hectic and survival on the hamster wheel. In the process, we cut back on our free time for family, friends and ourselves. Distractions such as television and social media, playing on game consoles, online or on the computer do the rest. Real play happens only to a limited extent and is often restricted to playing in our heads without real interaction with other people.

So, it's not surprising that everyday life eats us up more and more on the inside. This has significant health implications. The level of sick leave in companies in recent years is at a record high. Depression and burn-out, heart attacks and other “modern” diseases continue to increase.⁹⁹

If you consider the importance and the time that work occupies in our lives, it is astonishing how few employees are truly happy and absorbed in their jobs. It's hard to imagine what the atmosphere would be like if more people were happy in their work, if they worked with joy and motivation!

Leisure activities are not written off. The leisure industry is booming. These days, there's something for every interest. But even here, it's often about performance and competition rather than pure play and recreation.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe when adults become absorbed in their leisure time while playing and take this joy with them into their work. “Child-heads” are what such people are sometimes called. On the one hand, this is an affectionate and teasing term. On the other hand, it contains a pejorative. After all, what adult wants to be dubbed a child? There is and remains little room in the adult world for childishness and play. It's a pity, actually, because playing usually goes hand in hand with fun and enjoyment, which actually increases work productivity instead of decreasing it.

Although we know that play helps to reduce stress and stay mentally Agile, promoting well-being and health, it seems incompatible with the working world.¹⁰⁰ Our working world today is still very regulated, scheduled and controlled. Results are decisive. Free space for creativity would be too expensive, cannot be planned and controlled, especially since there is no guarantee of results.

In this construct, we humans are treated as resources. We are remunerated for this, so we allow or perhaps even encourage our treatment as resources. It is interesting that accounting records us humans as costs, as liabilities, while furniture or machinery, for example, are on the asset side. In accounting terms, this may be historically justifiable. But it also shows that we are giving up a large piece of humanity from ourselves.

But what if fun and enjoyment lead to better results?

The world of work and business is changing. Start-ups have increasingly contributed to this, and their working environments are sometimes fundamentally different from those in traditional companies. Workplaces often resemble living rooms or workshops that invite people to stay. They are very open and allow for dialog and collaborative work. Table soccer is as much a matter of course as a refrigerator with free drinks for everyone.

Not everyone has to like that. And yet it seems to be a trend in many companies to make workspaces more modern and appealing to employees, although office design is not primarily about modern furniture. What matters is whether I can encourage the development of an open culture through the design of the physical workspace. Recall Richard Sheridan's statement in Chapter 3 about the design of the work environment at Menlo Innovations: "We didn't create an open office. We created an open culture. Our physical space reflects some of our deeply held cultural beliefs about how we create great teams: openness, transparency, collaboration, teamwork, flexibility, and scalability."

The image of the employee behind a screen in a lonely cubicle has had its day, as has thinking and working in organizational silos. Whether and how far the redesign of the working environment will extend remains to be seen. In traditional companies, this is likely to be more difficult to implement than in start-ups, also for reasons of space and cost.

We must ask, why not? It has been proven that the immediate working environment has a significant influence on productivity and employee satisfaction.¹⁰¹ In this respect, modernizing workplaces is likely to be worthwhile. So why not design them as modern "playgrounds"?

The answer is often, too often, "Yes, that's good, but ...". When it comes to the "but," it becomes apparent that many are not yet ready to question previous assumptions and habits and to try out something new. People know that modernization brings a breath of fresh air, but they prefer to stick with the tried and true.

A few years ago, there was an advertisement for a bank on German television.¹⁰² In a crisis meeting, the chairman asks for suggestions on how to win back customers. The suggestion to wave colorful flags is received with goodwill. Another employee makes an alternative suggestion that would rejuvenate the old bank. The chairman is not at all enthusiastic about this and decides to go ahead with the colorful flags. Room for new ideas? Not really. Because tried-and-tested recipes are more convenient and less costly to implement.

Progress is not artificial. It is natural. Anyone who tries to stop it loses touch with reality. You become a “victim” of progress because you didn’t want to shape it yourself. Certainly, individuals may put up with it, but it is certainly not an option for society.



What can we learn from children?

In his book *The Art of Learning* (2008), Josh Waitzkin¹⁰³ writes that it has been found in competitive sports that organized childhood sports activities, such as soccer or tennis camps, do not automatically promote peak performance. It's much more important, he says, to ensure time and space for free learning through play. It's about playing for the sake of playing, not playing with a competitive spirit or purpose. Only in this way do children have the opportunity to explore and train their instincts through play. Faster, more effective, and more sustained learning is thus fostered and forms the basis for peak performance. Conversely, this means that if we suppress the play instinct and thus the exploratory instinct within us, we prevent performance. This is true for both children and adults.

Playing accompanies us throughout our lives. Sometimes more, sometimes less. The only question is how much play we want to allow in our lives. This is not about purely passing the time or escaping from everyday life. It's more about pure exploration, pursuing one's own curiosity without always having to pursue a purpose right away.

Parents report that their (young) children teach them again to develop imagination and to perceive the living environment in a more unbiased way. This approach can sometimes inspire them, for example, to engage with new technologies in a playful way - driven by curiosity and without a direct use case.

Gaming does not always have to serve a specific purpose.

“Play is play ... when it is pursued for its own sake. It is behavior without purpose, but not without meaning. Play is not necessary for immediate survival, it always happens voluntarily and outside of everyday life: In play, everything is allowed. Who plays, forgets the time and is completely with the thing, is immersed in the here-and-now.”¹⁰⁴

Play can happen out of pure fun and joy. And yet it is moments like these that lead to new insights. Innovations are rarely developed in familiar spaces. It is impressions and influences from outside that bring in new aspects and thus give rise to something new. Innovations in a secure laboratory environment are the exception rather than the rule.

When we observe children at play, we can, above all, observe their openness, impartiality and curiosity. It is the courage or the lack of fear to try out new things, to explore and thus to learn. Relapses are part of it but are not understood or demonized as such. How else can a child learn to walk? According to a study by Pampers, a child falls down many hundreds of times before taking the first step of his or her own.¹⁰⁵ Not so special, you think. And yet there's a little wisdom hidden in that number. A toddler who falls down may cry for a moment. But the toddler doesn't look around and try to find someone to blame for falling down. They get up and keep going until they finally stands. Once they have done that, they see the world with completely different eyes. As they takes their first steps, they quickly realize that the exploration is now much faster and also more exciting. These are moments of joy.

The wisdom of the child who learns to walk lies in the fact that they kept picking themselves up after setbacks until they reaches their goal. They took responsibility for their own progress, so to speak.

Yes, we can help a child learn to walk. But not by taking them by both hands and pulling them up so that they indicate the steps without being balanced and standing on their own. In fact, orthopedists warn against this assistance. Instead of helping the child, we harm them. First, because we disempower their will to learn something by themselves. And then because the child actually develops the necessary muscles and balance much later. So, if we "help" here, it can actually have a negative effect on the child's further development.

As parents, we can very much promote learning - by designing the child's learning space. For example, we want to make sure that electrical outlets are covered and secured, or that there are no sharp objects near the child that they can hurt themselves on. We can watch the child, rejoice with them when they make progress, encourage them to continue if they fall down. Not necessarily comforting when they have fallen down, because this can

reduce the urge to learn rather than encourage. Comforting always means getting the adult's attention. Possibly the child could understand it in such a way that they always get the attention and affection of an adult when they fall down, hurt themselves or does not reach a goal - certainly not very conducive.

In short, we can at best facilitate and encourage a child's learning experience. The child must learn on their own. We can provide and design learning environments. But we cannot relieve the child of learning. Because learning always has something to do with personal responsibility. This applies to both children and adults.

Innate urge to learn

The urge to learn is innate in us humans. It serves survival and is indispensable. Connected to the urge to learn is the search for orientation. As parents, we give our children an initial orientation - but only as a starting point for their own learning experience and exploration, for grasping and shaping the world. That is why learning is so important.

The child perceives and observes their environment. The urge to move and learn drives the child to explore and understand its own environment. Playing supports this process.

Learning successes, comprehension, even perception happen on their own. However, it would be strange to claim that a learning experience or a learning success is planned by the child. They approach an unfamiliar environment openly, curiously and without bias. Especially when playing, the child is in the here-and-now, lives in their own world, is completely “focused” on the activity at hand, without getting “stuck” in it. It is more a receiving of sensory perceptions and the combining of the impressions that are brought together to form a “whole” - that is learning. The learning experience arises all by itself, it cannot be planned in advance. And certainly not by the child.

In order for a child to orient themselves, they initially look for a role model, such as a parent. But it is one's own actions that lead to learning. Without this independent action, learning is not possible. Playing and being in the present, in the here-and-now, promotes the learning experience. In addition, the joy of learning plays an important role. Openness, curiosity and presence open the door to joy. It is the playful action that conveys joy and fun.

Playing and creating in the community

When a child plays with other children, this joy is increased. Sharing joy with others increases the joy in the group and the child's own. In addition, playing with others allows much greater spaces for learning experiences, design, and creation. More skills and abilities come together, people help each other, play and work together, and create something in common.

If several children play and build a large sandcastle together, for example, they follow a common intention. A child will hardly play with a group of other children if they do not have the will to do so. When children build something together, this may come about willingly, or it may develop on its own. How the "result", e.g., the finished sandcastle, is perceived by the individual children can again be quite different.

Without the overlap of individual desires, be it only the desire to play together, joint learning is not possible. Whether there is a purpose associated with the play is less important, if not irrelevant. More important is the shared motivation to play and spend time together.

Orientation in unfamiliar surroundings

Let's take a look at the different levels of complexity in learning environments. Simple challenges such as grasping with the hands are quickly mastered by children - also because they have natural reflexes.

If things become more complicated, we combine and thus learn new things. Past experiences help to classify new things and thus to comprehend them. It is different when we are confronted with phenomena that are completely unknown to us, that are constantly changing and that we cannot classify in our previous experiences. As an adult, we may be put off by this. A child may be more attracted to the unknown. They approach things with an open mind and curiosity, try things out, and thus find their way to understanding and learning success either by chance or through many repetitions and combinations.

It is somewhat different when we are confronted with a chaotic situation in which neither knowledge, past experience nor trial and error can help us. A small child is overwhelmed with the situation and may cry out. The crying is a kind of call for orientation and help at the same time. Either in the form of help from outside or at least help from someone else. If no one hears these cries and the child accepts this, they reorient themselves (if they have not fallen asleep first).

In a complex situation, children behave similarly, but probably act much more cautiously and slowly. In this way, however, they de facto orient themselves, that is, to their previous knowledge, their experiences, abilities and skills, and their actions (action and reaction). This means nothing else than that the orientation lies in the child. In other words, the anchor point of orientation is always us - regardless of whether the situation or challenge is simple, complicated, complex or chaotic.

Surroundings	Reaction of the child	Orientation of the child
Simply	knee-jerk reaction The new environment is quickly grasped.	motor, natural movement
Complicated	Thinking and combining help to grasp and comprehend the new environment.	own knowledge and experience
Complex	Try it out The new environment is met with curiosity and openness.	own knowledge and experience
Chaotic	Shouting The new environment overwhelms.	Seek outside help when stuck on your own

Environment-dependent reaction and orientation of a child

When we work with others in complex or chaotic environments, working together can give us direction or at least make it easier. The same is true for allowing, finding or working out answers or solutions to difficult questions or problems. Openness, curiosity, presence, joy and the courage to simply approach things in a playful way are a great help here.

In other words: If we are confronted with questions, problems or challenges that are unknown to us, we find the necessary orientation for clarifying the situation within ourselves or in cooperation with others. Generative learning helps us to do this. In doing so, we do not just passively perceive the new, but try to grasp it with our previous knowledge or to cope with it with our abilities and skills. Generative learning requires the step from passive consumption to active creation. “We must accept that the world [...] is strange and unpredictable, which at the same time provides scope for creativity and unpredictable leaps in development. The future is indeterminate, it is what we create out of the past and present. It is not a thing, but a doing: it comes into being by our ‘coming to it.’”¹⁰⁶ This is easier in the community than alone.



Prerequisites for generative learning

Generative learning must not be “stifled” but encouraged. In the social and economic world, we try to create safe living and learning environments and develop structures, rules and processes for this purpose. But this only works well as long as these do not restrict generative learning. Because generative learning can help in developing new orientation in unknown and uncertain environments.

But the fact is that life circumstances can change - especially in this day and age. If structures, rules and processes cannot keep up with the change, they keep us in a straitjacket and prevent us from going new ways or trying out and discovering new things. An unnecessary and slow bureaucracy is a good example of such a straitjacket. Or the requirement to follow a particular process because the process says so, even though the original reason for developing the process has become obsolete or changed. Adhering to a process for the sake of the process does not create value or contribute to learning.

The prerequisites for generative learning are stable and at the same time adaptive structures, rules and processes that contribute to a safe living environment and enable learning and further development. Let's return to the example of the child: If the child has successfully taken a first step, he or she immediately wants to try the next one and the one after that and so on. However, leaving the child in a small space where they can only take one or a few steps is anything but conducive to learning. The child wants to explore their environment. Leaving the child only in the playpen, for example, will quickly lead to resentment and crying. Sooner or later, we want to take the child out of the playpen and let them run freely.

Let's take a leap from the child's playpen to the individual, social and economic challenges of digitization. Why don't we simply recognize and accept digitization as our living and learning environment instead of demonizing it and possibly running away from the challenges out of sheer fear? After all, we created it ourselves. Why not continue to shape it now?

The orientation in the VUCA world lies in us. That is, we should orient ourselves to ourselves. “Us” includes both ourselves at the individual and group level and includes our social and economic system - and, of course, our environment. They are all part of us. The anchor for orientation in the digital VUCA world lies in us humans.

This is by no means a new insight. In Greek mythology, there was the Oracle of Delphi, which gave people answers to their questions. Thereby the most important answer and thus orientation was already given to them when they stepped over the threshold of the temple. There above the entrance the saying “Know thyself” was written. But it means nothing else when I write that we carry the orientation for the VUCA world within us. We only have to recognize this, accept it and act accordingly.

Digitization as a game and a tool

Digitization is no more an end in itself than it is a bureaucratic process. Rather, digitization is a plaything and a tool - both for exploring and for shaping our world.

If we forget this, digitization can quickly become an obstacle. We then use it to distract ourselves from shaping our world. It is not we who control and drive digitization forward, but conversely, we humans who then become the plaything of digitization. But this would create a horror scenario in which machines rule the world and not we humans.

In this respect, it would be simply stupid if some people wanted to make us believe that we have to do something for digitization. In reality, it is the other way around, that we should use digitization to do something for us humans. In this context, it is perfectly legitimate to demand and promote digitization without asking why and who it should serve. But if we don't ask why, we quickly become the victim of digitization instead of guiding it. And we miss the opportunity to use digitization to shape life the way we want it.

The challenges of the VUCA world are not so much problems as an invitation to rediscover, develop and live out our innate generative urge to learn and play. We will not be able to solve complex and chaotic problems and issues with tried-and-true methods and tools. What is required is curiosity, openness, a spirit of trial and error, and a willingness to work together - not to stop development, but to create stable and at the same time adaptive structures and rules that, on the one hand, safeguard what has been tried and tested and, on the other, promote and challenge generative learning so that we can shape the future individually and together.

What keeps us from rediscovering playing?

There are plenty of excuses to reduce, limit or control our play. “No time”, “too old”, “too childish”, etc. Yet we must not forget that there is magic in play - that of learning and progress. Sometimes it is this magic that can help us find answers to the VUCA world and digitalization - by approaching the questions with openness, curiosity and personal responsibility. This is not always purpose-driven. Sometimes it’s the playful approach that lets us find the answers. The orientation and the meaning lie within us. Provided we know who we are and where we want to go. Simple, isn’t it?

Before we look at a possible journey design in the next chapter, I’d like to introduce you to someone who has rediscovered “play” in the broadest sense for himself and has un-designed his life accordingly. When I met Malte Clavin in 2007 during a joint project at a telecommunications company, he was, like me, an external consultant on the road. Today, Malte is an adventure journalist and photographer. He travels the world, sometimes alone, sometimes with the whole family. When we spoke in Fall 2019, I wanted to know from him how this change came about and what drives him today.

Play, curiosity, fears and courage - a conversation with adventure journalist Malte Clavin



Malte Clavin

Thomas: Malte, you are an adventure journalist. At first, that sounds a lot like games and adventure. Have you always been like that? Or how did you become an adventure journalist?

Malte: I come from a merchant family from Lüneburg, Germany. My parents and my two older brothers were merchants. So, my path was also mapped out. Hence, I first became an industrial clerk. I then qualified myself further, studied social and business communication and obtained an MBA.

And yet I have always felt there is another Malte. I found this out by setting up my inner team. ... On the one hand, there is the Safety-Malte, who has been shaped by family history. He simply pursues the positive intention of providing for the family and maintaining the commercial on the historical roots of the family development. On the other hand, there is the Creative-Malte, who just does his capers, who wants to take photographs, travel, and the like. I've always noticed that the two Malte's get stuck together and compete with each other. However, I have

learned that it makes sense to implement a third Malte on top of these two Malte's. Namely, the MetaMalte, which acts as a moderator to guide both to its compromise. This model was extremely helpful to me. ... I realized that both Malte's have their justification, both pursue a positive intention. And so, I was able to say: "Okay, dear Safety-Malte, you have now worked on a project for eight months, you have earned money, you have provided for your family, you have put something aside. In return, dear Creative-Malte, you can now go away for four or even six weeks. "And so, there was always a compromise, and both remained calm.

I still work with this model because it is extremely helpful for me. I am convinced that divergent forces are at work in all of us. ... And that was also the deciding factor for me to set off for South-east Asia with my wife and daughter for six months in 2004. This trip led to two further trips: to Sri Lanka for half a year and Malaysia for four months. In the course of this, I reported on our travel experiences in more than 40 media outlets. And also, about what had previously always kept us away, blocked and hindered us from fulfilling these travel dreams. That's how I became a photographer and journalist. Later, I entered the travel lecture market and shared our experiences with over 18,000 people in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Over the course of time, I kept raising the bar a bit. At some point, I also started to go out on my own. I documented the Tiger Conservation Patrol for the WWF in Sumatra, spent five days in Vietnam with an expedition in the world's largest cave, and have now been to South Africa for a ranger training course.

Hobby, profession and game

Thomas: When you turn your hobby into a profession, to what extent is that still playing?

Malte: Playing is a very big component part. I see it as a part of life's design. Play always means that life remains playful, that there is not so much seriousness in it either.

I always consciously look where there are new challenges for me. I ask myself: "Does this tingle? Do I have to overcome myself somehow? Do I have to get out of my comfort zone, and does it have a photographically interesting aspect? " And if that's the case, then I go for it. That's how I've become a discoverer.

These are simply different stages of life. In doing so, it is very important to me to maintain the playful lightness. I learned this during an expedition in Burma, where I was confronted with my expectations. I had found out that besides the main river, the Irawadi, even further east on the border with Bangladesh, there was a river, the Chindwin River, for which there was no visual material at all. Immediately the National Geographic double page spread came up in my mind's eye and I thought, "Wow, I'm going to fly there and go down the river, take some pictures and then have a really great story in the can." So, I flew there and set down on the river in Hkamti on one of those old Chinese ferry boats. And I really stood there at the bow with my camera ready and thought: "Behind the next river bend, there it comes now, the double page". Only, it didn't come. Not on the first day, not on the second, not on the third. I noticed how I was becoming increasingly frustrated. I ranted and raved like a bastard. But then I also realized that my expectations in my head were just too strong and I didn't want to face reality. I met a monk who taught me, with a story about a Chinese farmer, that life is about simply accepting radically what is.

I stayed in that game, in the serenity. I made sure that everything in my sphere of influence was okay. So that the cameras were loaded and working and so on. And the rest was just not in my sphere of influence. I learned to stay calm and keep that playfulness. And I still go out with that attitude today.

For my last trip to South Africa, for example, I didn't do that much research in advance. I didn't want any expectations to arise again from certain images of animals ... That is then partly a bit naive. But because of that, the whole life, everything that happens around me, keeps a certain freshness and lightness.

I think ... you can deal with this attitude of play very well if you have a firm attitude for yourself. And you also allow yourself this self-empowerment to say: "Well, this is now at most outside the comfort zone. But it's not life-threatening, what's happening here right now."

Play means there are certain rules. But chance is a very important part of it. I always ask myself, how do I deal with this coincidence? I have learned to stabilize myself as much as possible, to become resilient, and to maintain control, certainty, and joy in life for myself, and to be aware of this again and again.

Perceiving curiosity as a drive, overcoming fears

Thomas: What is the importance of curiosity in your profession?

Malte: Curiosity is a very important driver to me. I believe that curiosity speaks through an inner voice, through a fresh impulse. I think it is extremely important to pay attention to this fresh inner impulse, to this curiosity, because this is a primordial energy. It evokes a primary image as an expression of our personal uniqueness. ... And finding that out, I think, is an essential task in life.

Most of us know about our own curiosity, but we don't follow it because something stands in our way that is far more powerful: fear. Few have learned what it means to walk through that fear, to face fears. Here's what many do: Either fears are bypassed, delegated, or masked; but rarely managed. The first three tactics are widespread. Especially in the business environment, fear is a taboo. People would rather talk about inability to perform, stress or stage fright. 18% of the German population suffers from fear. In companies, it's even worse: 42% of all German managers suffer from fear.

Aha experiences through openness

Thomas: Can you give examples of how openness has contributed to an "aha!" moment?

Malte: Yes, I attended a cold exposure training in Poland for five days, together with 60 other people from all parts of the world. As soon as we arrived, our instructor told us: "Meet me outside in five minutes. In shorts." We looked at the thermometer. Six degrees. "Shorts? And what else?" "Yeah, nothing." "Barefoot?" "Yes." Okay, then we all went out, 60 people barefoot in shorts at six degrees, walked through the forest for two hours. Mouth shut, oxygenated breathing – we had learned that briefly before – and just walking deliberately. We passed a frozen creek. We chopped up the ice and put our hands and feet in the cold water. In the afternoon, we went to the house where each of us took ice baths in large bath tubs that we had to chop up beforehand because they were completely frozen over. Each of us went into this ice bath four times, each for several minutes. That was a unique experience.

Since then, I take a cold shower every morning. It's part of my 'bulletproof daily routine'. I can tell you there is nothing like it. The feeling of that vibrancy and presence is incomparable. No espresso, no matter how strong, can deliver that. And you just check off for yourself every morning already and say, "Hey, this was in my power, in my control. I did it, I already won the day. No matter what happens now, this thing is up to me." That's when I realized, that's when you gain a new plateau of freedom.

And that's what it's about for me personally, simply gaining new freedoms. And that's a point where I go in with an open mind. I'm now specifically looking for challenges like this again and again.

Congenital and learned fears

Thomas: What other drives do you have besides curiosity?

Malte: I don't just look at curiosity, but always at fears as well. Because of course I am also shaped by fears. But I also know that we were ultimately born with only two fears, namely the fear of volume or noise and the fear of falling. There are programmed reactions for both. Crying as a reaction to fear of loudness and the Moro reflex as a reaction to fear of falling. All other fears are learned, acquired, passively copied. This also means that they can be unlearned.



*"Now I find tarantulas fascinating."
(Photo ©Malte Clarvin)*

For example, I did a spider, snake, and scorpion fear desensitization, because I travel a lot in rainforests. Before, I said, "Well, I just don't think a bird spider is that great." After the desensitization, after two and a half hours, I had such an animal on my hand and later on my head. And it's really like that. These fears dissolve. Because of that, a real transformation takes place. You are a different person afterwards. Now I find bird spiders fascinating. I can no longer understand how I could be afraid of them before.

And many people do not get rid of their fears. They have programmed themselves in their fears over and over again by firing the same fear reactions, the same neurological connections. They don't know the feeling when the fear is no longer there, when old fear feelings have dissolved and are no longer stored in memory. If they knew, it would probably be easier to overcome the fears. That's the big challenge.

The way our memory works is that we remember something when it is associated with a strong emotion, whether positive or negative. Without emotions, there is no memory. And the more positive impressions you fill your mind with, the more joyful or better you can go through life.

The view inward

Thomas: What is crucial when we set off into the unknown?

Malte: There are simply quite a few challenges in modern business management at the moment, such as unpredictability, technological speed, complexity, lack of transparency, susceptibility to disruption. These are all external influencing factors. The problem is that they trigger disruptive feelings in us that we are exposed to. And now we always try to bring about the solution externally through any methods, processes or anything else. We look for a solution in a domain where we simply have no control. But we don't look inward.

I believe it makes absolute sense to set out and open up one's own inner white spots on the personal map of the world and thus learn new skills in order to become more and more immune to such influencing factors not just temporarily, but once and for all. This is the right way for me.

Further exercises and questions

- Take the opportunity to watch children play.
- Observe and reflect on your own playing. What experiences do you have?
- Playgrounds: What are your playgrounds in life? Do you play in them or do you try to organize and control them? How do you experience the magic of play? Discover new playgrounds for yourself - approach things playfully, with the eyes and openness of a child.
- Exchange ideas with friends or colleagues on the following questions:
 - What does playing mean to you?
 - What are your playgrounds from yesterday?
 - What are your playgrounds of today?
 - Where do you want to play tomorrow?
 - What keeps you from playing?
 - How can you play more?
- You can find out what influence the word “but” can have in the following game: Form two groups. Both have the task of planning a trip from their current location to Tokyo within five minutes. In one group, each step is always answered with a “but”. So, if someone suggests that the group should call a cab to get to the station, another will object, “Yes, but...” and the group is allowed to continue discussing. In the other group, the word “but” is not allowed. Find out which of the two groups gets to its destination faster and easier.
- Examine the ways in which structures and rules in your environment promote or limit learning and experience.

8. Paths To Being Human

“Your outer world is the mirror of your inner world.

If you want more love, confidence, joy, fulfillment, and success in your life, you must lay the foundation for it within yourself.”

Laura Malina Seiler

Key points

- Medicine against noise: Listening without reaction.
- Solutions are the opposite of control. Solutions reveal themselves if we allow them to.
-
- The true focus on one's naturalness is found within.
- Being aware of and acknowledging your own feelings is a strength and at the same time can liberate you internally
- Vulnerability is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of being human. It is a sign of strength.
- Give your heart the space and the voice it needs.
- The question of meaning in life is not to be found in the head, but in the heart.
- If you want to be authentic, trust your heart and act accordingly.
- Tip to get out of the everyday chaos: don't try to be someone else. Be yourself!
- To live in and from one's own center is a leap into the middle of life and a source of infinite energy.
- The best way to create and shape a human environment is to be human yourself.
- Trust in oneself opens gates to shaping one's own playground of life.
- It is not only the masculine or the feminine energy in us that counts: In the harmony of masculine and feminine energy we find our true essence.
- Asking for help in hard times gives us a chance to practice trust in our lives.

“Who am I really?” - these and other related questions have been on my mind for some time. When I commuted to work by train for several weeks in the spring of 2018, I used the morning hour to explore these questions. Once I found my seat on the train, I said goodbye to my outside world for 30 to 45 minutes, plugged in my headphones, listened to quiet music, and relaxed. As best I could, I tried to turn off my head and my thoughts. I concentrated on my breath, listened and felt inside myself, enjoyed the moment and just sat still.

Before I drifted into this calm, I asked myself exactly one question every day that brought me closer to answering the core question, “Who am I really?” In the silence, simple insights to the daily question came to me. While still on the train, I made a few notes about it, later thought about the answer, edited and added to my text. Later, I decided to share these daily insights with a few friends. They in turn motivated me to post them online, which I did in the spring of 2019.¹⁰⁸ The following chapter includes these idea shards.

As valuable as the individual splinters and thought-provoking impulses are, they ultimately form a whole. They are helpful companions on the journey toward becoming and being human. They want to help provide answers to the questions of who we are and where we want to go.



Escaping from chaos and the hamster wheel

Medicine against noise: listening without reacting

In all the hustle and bustle and the noise that we experience day in and day out and to which we are at the mercy, it is sometimes extremely difficult, indeed almost impossible, to keep calm. We feel driven, we react, our head is pounding, we are pulled from left to right, everyone wants something from us, we are no longer the master of our senses.

Extreme or exaggerated? Possibly, but sometimes I find myself in exactly such a situation. It robs me of energy, concentration, balance. It's just exhausting. The joy of a quiet evening or a relaxed weekend is then enormous. Getting out of such a hamster wheel seems to be quite a challenge.

But it is not really difficult. Who says that we always have to react immediately to what comes at us?

We have at least two options:

1. We allow ourselves to become the plaything of the energy of others or of the hectic environment. In the process, we give off more energy than we can gain. We feel increasingly empty, drained, tired.
2. We come to rest, feel inside ourselves. Perhaps we concentrate briefly on our breath in order to arrive in the here-and-now. In this way, we gain a certain distance from the external world. Then we can still decide whether we have to, want to and will react to the impressions from outside - or not.

The realization that we can listen to our environment, but that it is not always necessary to react immediately or at all, is a simple and effective way out of the hamster wheel.

Simply letting the spoken word or action of a counterpart stand, simply being present and listening, reacting without compulsion or pressure can be a huge relief. It creates space, calm, spaciousness and sometimes even inner peace. For us and for the other person.

Medicine against noise:

(Listening) without reaction

Forget control

I like summer, the warmth and sun and the long days with lots and lots of light. But it's spring that I really love. It comes sometimes only creeping and then with the first flowering tree it seems to just explode within a very short time. I find it interesting that immediately before this explosion, nature seems so tidy and calm, as if someone had swept and prepared everything for spring.

They say that with spring life returns to nature. I think that image is deceptive. Because life is never gone, even in winter. It may be asleep. The change of seasons is a natural cycle. But what all seasons have in common is life. Sometimes louder, sometimes quieter, sometimes colder, sometimes warmer. It is always there and never really stops. And also, winter offers many beautiful charms. Be it the clear air, the cooling, long and cozy evenings, exercise in the fresh air, the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy colors in the rather gray nature all the more.

It is similar to the human energy of life. It may be that dark thoughts, negative experiences, fears and worries can darken our sun. But this must not lead to the mistaken belief that this is a permanent state and that this "dark" side would control life. The sun returns when we realize that the "dark" sides are only temporary. They never displace the light in the long run.

It is up to us to let the rays of life back into our lives in difficult times, to welcome them and participate in life again.

Control is temporary.

The energy of life is eternal. Feel it.

Flow: let go and detach

How nice it is to be without fears and worries, to be in the middle of life, to be able to enjoy it and to be in the “flow”.

“Flow”, the moment of being in the here-and-now, being 100% present, blocking out all distractions is wonderful. This can be through or during an activity, such as in sports, music, work, or rest such as in meditation. It is as if time stops and is exchanged with eternity. At the same time, Flow fills me with energy like hardly any other moment, activity or feeling.

It is all the more frustrating that it can sometimes be very difficult to get into your own flow, let alone be allowed to stay in it for long. There are so many distractions every day - be it problems and challenges, noise, plans, our own thoughts, etc. - that virtually preclude flow.

I often find myself trying to hold on to such flow moments, to cling to them. Just then, the flow state is over again. The head switches on. It may be that I still feel great. But the real flow is over at that moment. On the one hand, this can be frustrating, because I only want to prolong the beautiful moment. On the other hand, it reminds me that such a flow state doesn't come from the outside but arises from within.

When I get into my flow state, it's like I'm plugging into something that's always already there. But it's not an active latching on. Rather, I get into my flow when I let go and give myself to a situation. It is the opposite of control. In fact, “solution” means letting go of something, letting it unfold, looking at what is.

At first glance, this may not seem like helpful advice in a world where so much is about control, about performance, about goals and achieving them. This is not about giving up on goals or no longer pursuing them. But there is a difference between intention and focus, on the one hand, and blind and uptight persistence and wanting to force things, on the other. The latter puts blinders on us, in fact makes us blind to our environment and our being. In tricky, messy situations, solutions can seldom be forced, if at all. Solutions often show up only when you let go and allow them to do so.

The art is to remain in a relaxed state, to act and create in the here-and-now. Let's remember a child at play. When playing it is loosened, relaxed, serene and yet at the same time can be very focused.

Playing can thus become the key to flow. In flow, the impossible seems to become possible. Play, and with it a state of flow, ceases as soon as tension or cramping arises. Tension and play are thus mutually exclusive, incompatible. The moment we try to steer and control a flow state with our head, the flow state ends abruptly.

Solutions, design and creativity are very close to each other. They have nothing in common with control. Relax and let go, play, find your flow and enjoy it.

Solutions are the opposite of control.

Solutions reveal themselves when we simply allow them to.

Focus

Looking for a better, clearer focus on my own naturalness, flow and spirituality has helped me to remember and feel a deep sense of security and inner serenity. A nice and warm feeling, a safe and familiar environment where I feel secure, where there is no room for fears or worries, where I can let my soul dangle, which feels like a true home, where I can let go, where I can be myself. With this feeling of security comes inner peace, calm and the presence of one's flow. It is an ideal state to cope with challenges from outside.

Whenever a challenge approaches you, enter and feel your space of security, your own flow. Provided the challenge is truly meant for you, a solution will emerge.

Focus on your inner self and find your naturalness there.

This gives you a feeling of security.

Strife, anger, vulnerability

Be honest with yourself and show it

Arguments and disputes, misunderstandings, discussions, and anger are (unfortunately) part of everyday life. Not to lose oneself in such situations is sometimes an art. Something that helps me is to realize that I am not identical to the quarrel, the argument, the misunderstanding, the discussion or the anger.

Another help is to ask myself if I really brought out my own self or perhaps just played a role that helped cause or contributed to the dispute. Recognizing who you really are can be a liberation. A liberation from old, externally determined or self-designed roles that keep us from our true inner nature. Stay true to yourself, be honest with yourself and show the real you. Live.

Recognizing oneself is a liberation from old burdens.

Anger as a window to inner liberation

It is rare that I am beside myself with anger. It is even rarer that I let this anger come out of me. Certainly not always the worst choice when you are with other people. But it would be even worse to be aware of the anger, and to swallow it without first realizing where this anger comes from. Because then it might be a missed opportunity to become aware of the feelings that lie beneath the anger, to acknowledge and understand them.

An angry outburst can help put another person in their place. "Up to here and no further!" It is thus a kind of defense of one's own sphere. And it is also a call to be heard. An outburst of rage is after all hard to be overlooked!

But a tantrum also helps to put yourself in your place. Again, I can say, "This far and no further!"

What I sometimes find difficult is admitting my own anger. Too often I have swallowed anger. And I still do that sometimes. It dampens the anger, no question. At the same time, it dampens the possibility of noticing a part of myself that I may be trying to hide. Because anger can also be a path to inner liberation. Namely, when I look for the feelings underneath or behind the anger, acknowledge them, and admit them to myself. I believe that this is not always easy, especially for us guys.

Becoming aware of the feelings behind anger or even an outburst of anger is a big step out of anger. Not infrequently, these are feelings of hurt, sadness, insecurity, disappointment, and mortification. Admitting these feelings to oneself, perceiving them, giving them a space, but then also letting them go, comforting oneself, forgiving oneself and loving oneself - this can be a key to inner liberation.

Being aware of and acknowledging your own feelings is a strength and opens the way to inner liberation.

The voice of the heart

Mental garbage and the language of the heart

Distractions, passing the time, jumble of thoughts, restlessness. Unfortunately, this is still happening to me far too often. No peace, serenity, silence, no clarity in heart and mind. Many thoughts fly through my head. In and out without me being able to grasp a clear thought or find a mantra that calms me. It begs the question, where does this mental garbage come from in the first place that takes me away from my inner peace?

We can find an answer when we realize that thoughts are creations of the head. They do not come from the heart. The language of the heart is the language of love, devotion, life, inner peace. It is warm, soft, flowing, opening, clear - which cannot always be said of our thoughts. Between head and heart often lie worlds.

Thoughts are creations of the mind.

Be aware of your thoughts - but do not pursue every one of them. This is not an appeal to demonize your thoughts. Thank them - even if it is only for the pastime they bring you.

Then explore your own heart and its language. Create a space and time for this. Allow yourself and your heart this time. Don't listen so much to your head when you want to find inner peace. The head can sometimes fill you up with thoughts. Learn the language of your heart, give it a voice, act accordingly and shape your life.

Give your heart space and the voice it needs.

Meaning vs. purpose

What is a or the meaning of your life? This is not always a question of the head. Meaning tends to come from the heart, purpose from the head.

There, in the heart, the sense is crystal clear, refreshing, renewing, energizing. And it never clouds or changes. Our mind often tries to play with us, to distract us from the clarity and orientation, from the inner center.

This is not an invitation to shut down the mind, lock it in or lock it out, and throw away the key. We just need to be aware that thoughts, and therefore frequent mental garbage, are a creation of the head and not the heart.

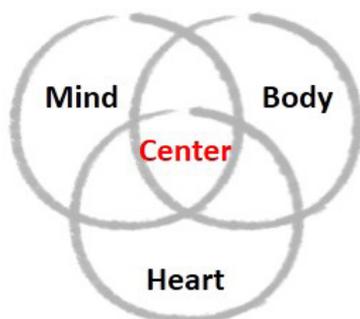
The head is a nice, very effective tool, but no more. We are not solely our thoughts. Life is much more. Our head can indeed help us understand and survive a complex world. And yet, it is only a tool. "Think" about it.

The answer to the question of the or a meaning is not to be found
in the head,
but in the heart.

Authenticity

More than ever, the question arises as to who we actually are. We are not our thoughts alone, as they are creations of the head. Our heart is the key to life. And yet, we are not only our heart. In fact, unfortunately, far too often we act without sense and reason - that is, detached from our heart and head. In such a case, we act purely physically and out of instinct.

Our head or mind, our heart and our body are very different and yet they form one unit. The question is: can we manage to harmonize mind, heart and body?



Harmony of mind, body and heart

I have experienced that when I lead my life from the heart, align my thoughts accordingly, and act physically, I am more authentic and closer to the real me. I do not have to play an artificial role.

My heart is the key to life. It gives me energy. When I can't speak directly to my heart, my intuition does - it's a kind of catalyst or interface to my heart. It gives me orientation.

The head rationalizes and combines. It is a necessary and very valuable tool in today's world. The body is action, manifestation of head and heart.

Being human is the harmonious triad of heart, head and body. This means living in and from one's own center. This is true authenticity, joie de vivre and life energy.

To live in and from one's own center is a leap into the middle of life and a source of infinite energy.

Orientation

Our authenticity is very personal and individual. It is unique. It cannot be copied. In this respect, any attempt to be someone else or to compare ourselves with another person is misleading. It cannot bring us closer to ourselves, rather it can keep us away from it. The same is true for trying to bend and pretend just to please others. This may be legitimate and necessary or wanted in some life situations. In the end, however, we are playing a role and are not ourselves.

The world of social media encourages people to compare themselves with others. To see what friends, acquaintances, celebrities or “influencers” are up to. It’s a great way to keep busy. On one hand, it can be an oasis in the stress of everyday life. On the other hand, it’s a distraction from myself. If I’m really drowning in the chaos of everyday life, longing for orientation, looking for energy, finally wanting to feel joy and have fun, social media may not be the right source of inspiration after all. The source of real inspiration is much, much closer than one thinks and is told by others - we ourselves are this source.

Don't try to be someone else.
Be yourself!

How useless it is to compare oneself to others when the true self is so unique and beautiful. It is useless to compete with others because being me is not a competition. Or, to put it another way, I don’t have to win anything or prove anything to be myself. After all, who do I want to compete with to be myself when I am already myself?

Hence: Be yourself and act accordingly! The energy that was previously wasted on unnecessary competitions, this energy belongs to you. A real gain, because things become easier and more natural.

To be able to be one with yourself is the most beautiful gift.
Love it.
Live it.

Your heart’s desire(s)

Why emulate others when we already have the source of life energy within us? It makes more sense to ask ourselves how we get to this source, as well as what keeps us from recognizing and using it.

As much as the question may be obvious, the question itself blocks us. It is our own head that asks this question. It is a thought. Thus, it is thoughts or our head itself that keep us from simply being and acting authentically.

When we harmonize heart, head and body, we are automatically authentic. There is nothing more to add. The questions of what keeps us from our own authenticity are in themselves a distraction and blockage. Isolate these thoughts, let them pass, trust your heart and act accordingly.

When you are and remain in harmony with your heart in thought and action, this removes all possible obstacles. Any obstacles are like clouds that temporarily block out the sun. They do not change the fact that the sun is there. It shines as clear and bright as your heart, if you don't like to hide it behind the thoughts yourself.

Therefore: When the head is too busy again, come to rest and listen to your heart. Concentrate on your breath, feel your heartbeat and let your thoughts pass by.

If you want to be authentic, trust your heart and act accordingly.

The call for responsibility

Self-confidence

Trust in fellow human beings and trust from other people can be like a warm, pleasant rain shower. Without trust in oneself, however, it remains superficial and fleeting.

Confidence in oneself is not necessarily the same as a healthy self-confidence perceived from the outside. I admit that I have sometimes feigned such self-confidence while deep inside I was plagued by fears, worries or doubts. I have tried to ignore them for myself, to cover them up and hide them from the outside world as a matter of course. I succeeded in this and I still succeed today... at least, it appears so to the outside world. And yet it was and is a deception before me and ultimately a sign of non-authenticity to the outside world.

Only now that I am learning to trust and love my own self, my being, am I living more easily and feeling better all around.

Confidence in yourself attracts equals. It's not about seeing or feeling if other people are human when you're not, when you're not being yourself and not acting like it when you're not in your natural flow. It would be a waste of time and energy. Being human yourself motivates others to do it, and your environment will automatically change, will become more human.

The best way to create and shape a human environment is to be human yourself.

I create and shape my own life and environment and thus discover my own playground. Conversely, this means that one's own playground is not defined by the outside world. It is my playground. So, we must find and create it ourselves, and it is up to us to invite others to join in.

It's time to play, be and express yourself.

Trusting in yourself helps you create the playground of your life.

Creativity

We live in energy fields, attracting certain circumstances and people. Our immediate environment is a reflection of our own energy field. It is easy to blame others for our lives and our surroundings. Yet we ourselves are responsible for our lives and how we live them.

Responsibility for our lives is not a burden. It is a gift that gives us clarity. It is up to us whether we want to accept this gift and how we deal with it. At the same time, it is a unique opportunity to be creative.

“It is possible that we do not see ourselves as creative people. In fact, we create our reality based on our thoughts, feelings, views, goals and actions every moment of every day.”¹⁰⁹

“So, let’s look at our life as a work of art, and that it is we who shape it who are its co-creators.”¹¹⁰

This is not about emulating famous artists like Leonardo da Vinci or Mozart. That would be focusing on external recognition. It’s about our own artwork, for which we ourselves are the viewers and admirers first. It is about our self-discovery, our presence and creative self-creation. It’s not about the voice of others, it’s about our own voice, about finding it.

Life design begins with us. In other words: We are responsible for how we have shaped our lives in the past, how we do it today, and how we want to do it tomorrow.

There is no question that our past shapes us. But we cannot shape the past. We can come to terms with the past, look at what it has taught us for and about ourselves, be aware of our experiences and give thanks for them. If we want to arrive in the here-and-now and actively shape our lives, it is important not to drag the burden of the past with us, but to cope with it, accept it and let it go. If we want to live in the present and shape the future, holding on and living in the past is not an option.

Self-discovery, presence and creativity go together, complement each other and form a wonderful whole.

Energy

“Everything is energy. Match the frequency of the reality you want, and you create that reality. This is not philosophy. This is physics.”

Albert Einstein

Your true, inner being is not equal to your physical, material body. Your true being is pure energy, which is full of colors, universal, pulsating, vibrating, loving, expanding, inwardly peaceful, joyful, perfect, in balance, unique.

It is amazing that we normally do not perceive and accept ourselves in this way. The question is not how we can show our true inner being to others. Rather, it is about being aware of oneself and simply perceiving and enjoying one's own being. Not to show off, but to feel our own inner energy.

We are energy, light and joy. Show it and enjoy it. Be in the flow of your own being and create your destiny, your goals, your tasks and your effect. For you and therefore also for your universe, your environment.

Your true being is neither matter nor a physical body.
Your true essence is pure energy.

The middle way

Yin and Yang

The Yin and Yang sign is thousands of years old. It is a symbol of the difference and at the same time the unity of female and male energy.

Yang stands for the “masculine principle of movement and creative activity. ... Yang symbolizes the power to act, the energy that drives the world, and the realization of thoughts and goals in concrete form.”¹¹¹

Yin stands for “the female principle of receptivity.”¹¹² Yin symbolizes the strength of pausing, “the sensitive[n] and awake[n] perception of one’s own and other’s doing and letting”¹¹³, of openness. It is a state of inner serenity and inner trust. Yin, meanwhile, does not mean passivity or doing nothing. Rather, it means “consciously letting things come to you and being open to the abundance that wants to flow to you. This includes not only a sensitive and alert perception of what others do and leave, but also thinking about how it affects you and your own doing and leaving”¹¹⁴.

Both Yin and Yang are of great importance in themselves. But it is only in the harmony of Yin and Yang that natural balance and real power are revealed. It is not a matter of just actively rushing forward, always taking the initiative and determining. The initiative is just as important as the gift of conscious perception and self-reflection, for which Yin stands. Conversely, focusing solely on Yin is not useful. It is about the togetherness and a balance of Yin and Yang.

Thus, to claim or wish that the future is feminine is as misleading as saying that the past and present are masculine. It is true that striving for control and power has shaped our society, as one of many manifestations of male energy, for many centuries - but fortunately not only. To equate Yang with control, striving and power is too short-sighted. Just like demanding that today it is time to put female energy in the foreground. What matters is the balance of female and male energy. This is human.

If we really want to be and behave as human beings, we must realize that naturalness lies in the balance of feminine and masculine energy, Yin and Yang. In a world in which it is difficult for us to accept, live and behave as human beings and not as a functioning resource, the feminine energy of self-reflection, of sensitive and alert perception of both our own and others' actions and letting go helps us to become aware again of our humanity with all its limitations, but also strengths and potentials. This helps us to arrive and live in the here-and-now and can give us inspiration for how we want to live and how we want to shape our lives.

However, this awareness alone is not enough. What is ultimately decisive is what we make of it. It helps us to decide whether, when and where we act from our own inner and human core or as an externally controlled something. There is no reason to delay this decision. We are the shapers of our destiny.

For us, this means that men should also accept the female energy and women the male energy within themselves, perceive it, love it and experience it. One-sided striving leads to inner imbalance. Our energy decreases as a whole. Balancing with the feminine energy is energizing, allows energy to flow and helps to find our inner balance and inner peace and to stay in it and her. It is source of real life and being human.

It is not only the masculine or only the feminine energy
in us that counts.
In the harmony of male and female energy
we find our true essence.

Help and trust

There are days, or sometimes just moments, when we feel like throwing everything away, crawling into a cave and starting all over again. These are feelings of frustration, disappointment or even hurt that gather inside us and boil up. And they are more intense when such feelings have been "fermenting" inside us for a long time and we see no way out. The only problem is that we usually don't have the option of throwing in the towel or escaping, or it just doesn't fit at the moment. What to do?

What helps me personally is to park the load or, even better, to hand it over. I myself then say, for example, “Okay, dear universe, thank you for the challenge and your trust in me. But I can’t and won’t carry anything more right now, I need a break. Please take care of the details and bring me a solution.” I follow this request with an active letting go, taking a breath, shutting down - even if only for a few hours or a night.

The moment I have made my request and let it go, I not infrequently feel real relief. It is sometimes like a return to life - which, after all, never stopped, only was not visible or perceptible to me due to my clouding thoughts and worries. The effect is enormous.

After arriving back at life, living it, enjoying the moment or having a night’s sleep, I take another look at the problems, thoughts, fears and worries, this time from a fresher and more awake perspective. It’s possible that they’re still there. But my perspective on them has often changed. This can lead to a solution revealing itself through a different perspective, or I realize that the problems and fears don’t deserve my attention, or I realize that they are not really my problems, but those of other people.

Sometimes before I go to bed, I write down my questions or worries and put the writing pad away. The first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is to take the writing pad and give the questions or concerns from the night before a quick read through, and then I start writing down what comes to mind. It’s amazing what answers and clues I find that weren’t on my radar at all the night before.

No, we are not responsible for everything. And no, we do not have to solve all the problems of this world or carry them on our shoulders. Asking for help in difficult times, be it from a fellow human being, from the universe, or from God, is by no means a sign of weakness.

It’s a chance to practice letting go and trusting yourself and life. At the same time, it is a reminder to us that we are not perfect. How could we be! That is human and that is what makes us.

Personal responsibility for shaping our lives does not mean having to go through life alone. We do not live in isolation but are social beings. Personal responsibility also means asking fellow human beings for help and support when needed or inviting them to help shape our lives.

Asking for help in hard times gives us a chance to practice trust in our lives.

9. Gratitude

“It is not the happy who are grateful. It is the grateful who are happy.”

Francis Bacon

Key points

- Gratitude breaks through the boundaries of time.
- Gratitude causes me to open the horizons of my own perception.
- Gratitude helps us become and be human even in difficult situations. It is a door opener to being human and to life.
- We may well be grateful for the challenges and unanswered questions of the digital world. They are an opportunity to prove our existing strengths and ingenuity, to try out new things and to learn.
- Gratitude unfolds potentials and opens perspectives.
- Gratitude shows that change is possible in every moment.
- Perfectionists are people who are afraid, because perfection strives for control. And control is an expression of fear. And fear is an expression of a lack of self-worth. Perfectionism is therefore a symptom of a lack of self-worth
- Change is what my nature is. You don't actually have to be grateful for change. Change is a law of nature that takes place whether I like it or not.
- Mindfulness is the understanding that I can use gratitude to achieve a state of happiness.
- Gratitude gives life meaning.

Where can I start being human?

In the last chapter we learned about many different elements or building blocks that help us to be human - ourselves - again or more. Some of these building blocks can be implemented immediately because you may have a direct connection to them or have already tried them out. Or you already live them. Other building blocks, on the other hand, seem like a giant wall that you want to get over, but you don't have a clue how to do it.

If this is the case, there is a simple but very effective approach to shedding light on it. It is gratitude. And it's gratitude in all its facets. At its core, it's about being grateful for what we already have, who we are, what we've already accomplished, and what we still plan to do. Sounds simple? Well, it is in itself. It's also because each and every one of us has already been grateful for someone or something, or even ourselves. So why not start with something that each of us already knows?

Why can gratitude be the key to being human?

When we are grateful for something or someone, we are usually reflecting on something in the past. And we can also be grateful for what we are currently experiencing or observing. And yes, we can even be grateful for something that has not yet happened but is already real for us.

Gratitude helps us to consciously perceive and acknowledge someone. Or to consciously perceive and acknowledge something. Regardless of whether an event has occurred, is occurring, or may occur in the past, present, or future. Gratitude is a way of acknowledging and celebrating these moments - both large and small.

In all cases, by expressing gratitude, I bring about joy, recognition and relief for myself or for others to whom I express gratitude. Expressing gratitude lightens the mood and brings new energy into the room. This, in turn, can help me approach challenges with renewed vigor and confidence. I take the positive energy of gratitude with me into my next steps and can thus take on some new challenges more easily and with more energy.

Gratitude also has the effect of opening up the horizon of my own perception. If, after a long, stressful day, I reflect on what I was grateful for that day, it can help me to put what I perceived as negative into perspective. I realize that not everything has been bad and that there are good things to be grateful for. Even if this good part may only be small on some days. No matter how bad a day has been, I can always find something for which I am grateful.

Thus, gratitude contributes to a balanced perception and experience. Gratitude can bring light into the darkness. The balance I find can help me to ground myself, to arrive back in the here-and-now, and thus to be myself again. In other words, gratitude helps us to become and be human even in difficult situations. It is a kind of door opener. Not bad for something that each of us knows - yet practices far too rarely.

Gratitude helps us to feel both external and internal joy or to trigger it in others to whom I express my gratitude. It makes it possible to be seen, heard and felt.

How can gratitude push away clouds?

Some time ago I had an argument with someone who is very close to my heart. She asked me to write down everything that bothered me about her and what she could change if necessary. I promised to do this. But I didn't get very far with it. Instead of making a list of things that annoyed and disturbed me, I started to write down everything I was grateful for. I was amazed myself at how long that list became. That was one thing. The other was that writing down things, qualities, and experiences that I was grateful for filled me with great joy and energy myself. The argument we had before faded away with the long list of gratitude, it no longer had any real power.

A few days later, I confessed to her that I had not made the list as I had promised and had written another list instead. At first, she was disappointed. But that quickly changed when she read the new list of gratitude.

Gratitude can indeed help dissipate the darkest clouds in a relationship.

Gratitude for problems and challenges

Gratitude is not only applicable for good things. As abstruse as it may sound at first glance: I can also be grateful for negative things. Be it for problems, challenges, questions or crises.

In Chinese, the term “crisis” has two very different meanings. On the one hand, it describes the risk, the problem. In other words, what we expect from the term “crisis”. The other meaning of crisis, however, is opportunity and chance.

In fact, “crisis” in the narrower sense only means a state between one or more old and new states. This became particularly clear during the 2020 Coronavirus crisis, where we spoke of a time before and after the crisis, or of an old and a new normality.

But how can a crisis also be an opportunity?

Crisis as an opportunity

The answer lies in the perspective of how we view a crisis. For one person, a crisis is something quite terrible. For another person, however, it’s just the opposite. Or it’s something in between.

In chapter 4 we learned how valuable and helpful reframing can be, i.e., reformulating questions we have, if necessary “turning them upside down”. Reframing opens up new horizons and perspectives that have not yet shown up from the beginning, but ultimately have always been there. We simply have not been able to see them from our own limited point of view or with our blinkers. Reframing opens up new perspectives and opportunities for learning, and thus for solving problems or answering questions that were tricky before. Both can then contribute to change.

Let’s take the Covid pandemic as an example. More or less overnight, the old normal was history. Instead of working in the office, home offices became the norm in many cases. With traditional meetings no longer an option, the question became how to use technology to make online meetings as interactive as possible. To be sure, this

was no substitute for face-to-face meetings. However, people were often surprised at the variety of ways digital tools could be used. For example, people enjoyed the fact that results recorded on virtual whiteboards could be used right away as a record of results. This helped to save a lot of time and made meetings more efficient.

Another example: The local tango studio that my wife and I had frequented for years could no longer open its doors. This meant an enormous loss of sales. But instead of asking, “What’s going to happen now?”, owners Isabella Bayer and Jaro Cesnik thought about how they could still serve their tango community.¹¹⁵ From then on, dance classes were held online via Zoom. Initially 100%, then later both on-site and online - for those who didn’t want to or couldn’t dance on-site yet. Not only did the customer base thus remain largely stable, but new customers were gained.

What both examples have in common is that the crisis was seen as an opportunity and then contributed to actual change. Futurologist Matthias Horx explains: “A crisis only becomes an opportunity when it becomes ‘change’. But how does that happen? First of all, by recognizing the crisis as such.”¹¹⁶ Reframing can help with this.

Risks

The fact that there is also an opportunity in every crisis does not mean that we want to play down or ignore risks, questions or problems. Certainly not! Risks need to be seen just as much as opportunities. It is not enough just to describe them and leave it at that. Especially when it comes to serious risks, risks that can have a major negative impact on us, we want to understand what is behind the risks. What are their causes and what can we do to address these causes?

If I do that, there can also be an opportunity in the risk - namely that I can minimize or perhaps even eliminate the risk. In other words, dealing with problems and risks can of course lead to a better state of affairs. In this respect, we can very well see them in a positive light.

Risks and opportunities

“He who always does what he already can, always remains what he already is.”

Henry Ford

It becomes dangerous when we focus exclusively on risks and disregard opportunities. By the way, the reverse also applies. Those who see only one thing limit themselves and their vision, put on blinkers and lose touch with reality.

It is obvious that this is highly risky, especially in a VUCA world. We don't want to become a pawn in the game. We want to shape the VUCA world. But this requires that we not only see the risks or, conversely, not only the opportunities of the digital world, but that we strive for a balanced view. Those who see only negatives and stoke fear will see only negatives and experience only fear. Those who see only positives and praise them live in cloud-cuckoo land. Neither is particularly helpful in shaping our future.

Ultimately, it requires a holistic view of the past, the present and the future. Only in this way can we find answers and solutions to present and future problems and questions. In this respect, we can very well be grateful for the challenges and unanswered questions of the digital world. They are an opportunity to prove our existing strengths and ingenuity or to try out and learn new things. Ultimately, they are a unique opportunity and a call to shape our present and future.

Of course, ignoring today's and tomorrow's challenges and running away from them is also an option. That's fine if you can live with the consequence of becoming a pawn in the digital world and come to terms with it.

Ultimately, the perspective on the challenges of our time is a matter of attitude. We can freeze with fear and anxiety, despair or try to run away. Or we can be grateful for these challenges and embrace them as opportunities to create. What you focus on will always grow, will expand.

Search the space

When I first went skiing and snowboarding in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, my friends invited me tree skiing or tree boarding because the best snow was between the trees. I joined them but ended up experiencing an insane amount of stress in the process. How did my friends manage to ski through the woods so easily and still have fun? I tried hard to avoid the trees. Quite often I had to make an emergency stop to avoid hitting a tree and injuring myself. When I told my buddies about my dilemma, they laughed out loud. They recommended that I focus less on the trees and more on the gaps and wide spaces and the great snow in between.

No sooner said than done. And it worked!

Since then, I have loved skiing and snowboarding through the Aspen woods in the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

It was all a matter of perspective. Or a choice between stress and risk of injury on the one hand and fun and joy on the other. I chose the fun and joy.

It's true: The more I focus on something, the more I see of it. Like attracts like. With the choice of my focus, I see exactly what the respective perspective allows me to see.

Gratitude unfolds potentials and opens up perspectives for me, creates a balance between the positive and the negative, acknowledges what is and what may yet be. No one forces us to be grateful or to integrate gratitude into our lives and make it a fixed part of our everyday life. If we do not do it, the world will not end. It is just possible that work will then only be work and that we will not discover and thus not be able to develop huge potentials.

Learn gratitude

If gratitude has not yet entered your daily routine, or not yet the way you would like it to be, the following small daily routines can help:

Open your senses

No matter what you are doing, stop for a moment, be fully aware of the here-and-now. Listen to the sounds around you or within you, notice your breath, feel your heart, look around you. Open all your senses and notice your surroundings and yourself for a few moments and give thanks for this.

“For me, the key to happiness is gratitude. It means not hurrying past the little things in life and fully enjoying the big milestones. Sometimes you have to stop, take a breath and press pause so your soul can catch up with you. Sometimes, though, you can just go nuts like a rock star and be proud of yourself.”¹¹⁷

(Lars Amend, author and influencer)

The gratitude journal

Right before you go to sleep at night, think for a few moments about what you were grateful for that day and write it down. There is no limit to this. But try to write down at least three things you are grateful for today.

The next morning, look at the list again. Maybe go over your plans and goals for the day in your mind. Look forward now to what it will be like, how you will feel when you have achieved them, and be grateful for them.

The daily synchronization in the team

In many teams, it is common to meet once a day to synchronize. This involves asking three questions that each person in the group answers so that everyone is up to speed. The three questions are as follows:

1. What have I achieved since yesterday?
2. What do I want to achieve today?
3. Where do I need help if necessary? Where do I see problems, risks or also opportunities?

Add a fourth question to the questions at the beginning or end, as follows:

4. What am I grateful for today? Alternatively, you can ask: What makes me happy today?

Both questions are excellent for lightening the mood in the team. With these questions, you create space for human things that may be neglected at work - the answers to these additional questions may relate to both work and private life. They are individual and personal and therefore always right for the person in question.

On the one hand, you may dismiss the additional questions as “fun questions”. On the other hand, you can say a lot about yourself by answering the question. And you also have the opportunity to please others, for example, by helping them achieve their “happiness goal” in answering the question “What makes you happy today?”. Buddhist wisdom says, “You can choose to be happy. If you want to be happier, help others to be happy.”

Rotating gratitude in the team

Once per working day, each team member sends a short note to another team member thanking the other person for something. The next day, they write to another team member. The team decides if there is a fixed order for the rotation or if they want to redefine it every day.

Problem solving in the group

When we look for an answer to a tricky question or a solution to a problem in a group, we not infrequently get started right away with great zeal. Alternatively, however, we can start by reviewing and honoring our own achievements in this context. So instead of criticizing an unsatisfactory state or problem, for example, you begin to acknowledge what you have already achieved and explore why you are so good and what you want to improve about it and why.

Starting a search for answers and solutions with such a review and gratitude round releases many a tension, releases creative energy and thus helps to find new solutions and answers.¹¹⁸

When do I start?

These are just a few examples of how I can incorporate gratitude into my life and integrate it. Since each of us has experienced gratitude, it shouldn't be hard for you to come up with some ideas. Only, ideas alone are only half the battle. They get really interesting when you implement them. So, what are you waiting for?

Happiness is learnable - Interview with Dirk Gemein, mindfulness coach and happiness teacher



Dirk Gemein

Dirk Gemein is a mindfulness coach and happiness teacher¹¹⁹. His basic belief is that everyone can learn to be truly happy through knowledge and experience. He is a studied philosopher and sociologist, former management consultant and marketing manager. He lived for some time in Buddhist monasteries in Asia and for many years has devoted himself entirely to the practice of mindfulness and meditation. He lives with his family near Koblenz, Germany.

In Fall 2019, I spoke with him about the connection between change, happiness, and gratitude.

Change, happiness and gratitude

Thomas: What is the connection between change, happiness and gratitude?

Dirk: The first thing you have to ask yourself is what is the connection between happiness, change and gratitude and what actually is happiness. You can do a nice experiment on this by closing your eyes now. Then you complete the sentence, "For me, happiness is"

Stop, eyes open. The exercise is over. What is your answer?

Thomas: Happiness is in the here-and-now.

Dirk: Yes. The thing is, if everybody was striving for happiness, maybe you'd have to have a roadmap for that first, what that's supposed to be. I'm doing this exercise to show that most people are doing something for 40, 50 years and don't even have a definition of happiness but put their whole life under a bushel of wanting to be happy.

The most beautiful definition I know is happiness is the absence of suffering. That means that if I want to be truly happy, I have to take care of what keeps me from being happy. But the emphasis is on taking care. So, happiness is taking care, not waiting. You can't get happiness; you can't find it. You can experience happiness by living presently in the here-and-now and taking care of it with everything wholesome that you have. This is called in Buddhism or mindfulness "the noble eightfold path," the teaching about right intention. My basic intention in life is to create no suffering for myself and for all other living beings on this planet. That is the basis for everything I do.

Change for most people, I would say, is the pursuit of happiness. That's the process of change that you strive for. You want to be happy in some way. So, first of all, I need a foundation that tells me when I get up in the morning, what am I going to do with the 16 to 24 hours that I'm going to be awake right now? What motivation do I have, what foundation, what intention for this day? For me, it's avoiding suffering. That's why I don't talk about happiness anymore. I always talk about avoiding suffering in order to bring about change.

Then you gave me a beautiful keyword: Gratitude. How can I heal myself? With gratitude. If my teeth hurt, I thank my kidney, my liver, my eyes, my muscles, my feet, my nose, the things that are doing their job wonderfully right now. I don't focus on my tooth and say, "This stupid tooth and this pain." Instead, I make myself aware that the tooth that's calling in with pain is telling me, "Hey, there's something wrong in your system. That's what a toothache does, and any other physical pain does, too. That's what the car does when it flashes red and says, "Thomas, did you forget to refill the oil again? You better take care of that." And when the emotion screams and says, "I'm angry," we sit there and have no idea what to do with it. That's why gratitude is a very important principle. Gratitude for what's there right now.

For example, when people are sad because they have lost their partner because of death or separation, you have to think about healing this form of grief. And a good way to heal grief is gratitude. When I stand at my grandma's grave, I can say thank you for her raising me, what she taught me, the love I got, the hugs I got, sitting on her lap, and so on and so forth. Having gratitude for the fact that the one was there eases suffering and grief. The moment I establish gratitude in myself as an emotion, there is no room for anything else. Because we human beings cannot think two things on top of each other. You can't think one on top of two at the same time. How can I think "I thank you" and "I am suffering" at the same moment? I can't. If I practice gratitude, I have gratitude within me. That leads to the change of suffering. Sorrow changes because it is doused or saturated with gratitude, you might say, and then there is a mixture that eases that pain. For me, this is a very pragmatic way of transforming suffering into happiness through gratitude.

The same is true for a partnership. Partnerships often end disharmoniously. Most of the time I have people sitting here on the sofa and I remind them that they once chose this person because they saw something beautiful, something very special in him and gave him something good. Only, if that has changed now, it doesn't mean that you have to categorically reject that person. You can say to yourself, "Okay, life is continuous change. Either we were together, and we changed together, or now we've moved apart." But you can also end a relationship with gratitude. Saying, "Thank you for the time that was good and also thank you for the time that was not good." Because when do we learn the most about ourselves? When are we most willing to change? When we are suffering. Can't you thank someone for somehow actually helping you to be happier by first teaching you what suffering is?

An example from me: It was almost ten years ago now when I had a blood clot in my head and almost died from it. I struggled very, very hard with it for two years. This valley, this suffering, feeling suffering, reminded me that my purpose for life is not suffering, but happiness. From there, my definition is that suffering is simply the stair before happiness. And then I have to use suffering to get to know myself, to learn, to develop, to unfold a perspective.

Suffering as self-love

Thomas: How would you explain suffering?

Dirk: This is something that hurts me, something that is “unwholesome” for me in the first place, at first glance. On the primary level, it is something that causes pain. It is that which is suffering, from which distances me, so to speak, from my own self-worth, from my own self-love.

The crazy thing is that suffering is pure self-love. After all, it is a strong emotion for me. I miss love. And at the same time, pain results from it. This is what is called in mindfulness “the emptiness of all things.” So, in everything there are all things, but then somehow also not.

There is no anger, there is no fear, there is no victim, there is no such thing. There are just a lot of things that come together, that somebody sits there and says, “I feel bad today.”

When people come to me and say, “I am a perfectionist,” people are not perfectionists. Then they are people who are afraid. Because perfection strives for control. And control is an expression of fear. And fear is an expression of lack of self-worth. So, it's not about perfectionism. Perfectionism is a symptom of lack of self-worth.

It's like the common cold. If you have a runny nose, it's not the flu. The flu is inside you. What you see is the nose running. But you can't get rid of the flu just by blowing your nose. It's the same with the emotions that we see as suffering on the first layer. When you're mindful, you get a much deeper understanding of what that actually is. If you ask my students what suffering is, they say: “It's a diseased form of happiness, I have to heal it, I have to take care of it.”

Thomas, have you ever been afraid?

Thomas: Yeah, sure.

Dirk: Would this fear also exist if Thomas Juli didn't exist?

Thomas: No.

Dirk: Then who is the father and mother of this fear?

Thomas: Oh, that's us.

Dirk: Yes. And what do you do with your children when they're doing badly?

Thomas: You comfort them.

Dirk: Right, we can do that because we learned it that way. But we don't get the idea to apply that to ourselves, to comfort ourselves.

Suffering as a precursor to happiness

Thomas: You described suffering as a precursor to happiness. Tell me, how can I learn happiness?

Dirk: By first deciding for myself what happiness actually is.

For most people, happiness is satisfaction. They talk about happiness in terms of moments that are, poof, there when you fall in love, when you get married, when you become a dad, when you win the lottery, when you spend two weeks a year in the Maldives. But those are actually moments of happiness through intense distraction, namely stimuli that come from the outside, and so I experience a moment of freedom from suffering. The thing is, when I stop distracting myself from myself, maybe that's no longer there.

It is important that we first learn that the world within us, as we see it, does not exist like that. It comes in through our sensory stimuli and then we have to process that. And the result of processing is how we see the world. That is, we have to go to the place where emotions arise, and that is within us.

We look at our whole life with and from our sense organs. That means we are incredibly good at perceiving external phenomena like the weather, for example. And we have emotions that arise within us. But we look for solutions outside of us in consumption, status, and so on.

The thing is, in order to learn happiness, you have to go to the place where emotions arise, and that is within me. This means we have to change our perspective. We have to sink into ourselves. We have to get into a state where we are alone, not distracted. And then we have to do an emotional inventory first. This, to me, is the first step of meditation. Not to establish silence, but to perceive the volume within me, this monkey mind, this momentum of thinking.

I like people to sit down and ask them to breathe for two minutes without thinking. No one can. And then you realize: "I'm thinking, even though I don't want to think. And topics I've been thinking about, I haven't chosen either. Crazy! No self-control at all. I think even though I don't want to think. I think about things, whose topics, contents I have not chosen at all. They were there all at once and in a state where I am focused on myself." You have to think about what this process is doing when I'm looking outside of myself all day. I don't get that at all. And for me, that's the first step in learning happiness, that you change your perspective quite drastically, namely into yourself. Because emotions arise in me, suffering is in me, change can only take place in me and the whole world, as it is, takes place exclusively in me. Because if I do not perceive it, do not evaluate it, do not smell it, do not taste it, do not hear it and do not feel it, it does not exist for me.

For me, happiness can be learned by starting to be very honest with oneself through mindfulness. This includes, above all, saying: "Yes, I'm not perfect. And you know what? I will never achieve that. Because just being human means not being perfect. I am not perfect, and I never will be. That's why I'm so honest, and that's maybe how I can deal much better with what I now call a potential to be developed and used to call flaws or failings in myself."

That's why, in order to learn happiness, being present in the here-and-now is so incredibly important. Because life simply takes place now. I have no other moment. For me, the most beautiful formula for learning happiness is to be in the present moment, the one that is there right now, to use everything wholesome that I have in me for this one moment. One second and I pack all the wholesome knowing and doing and thinking and feeling and caring that I have in me into that one second. And when that is over, I do exactly the same with the next second. And if I forget it, it doesn't matter, because then there is a new now and I can take care of it again. If I am mindful in the moment, I can take care. If I'm not mindful, okay, then I wasn't mindful, but it's okay. When I have noticed that the moment of carelessness is already over.

Gratitude for change?

Thomas: Why can I be grateful for change?

Dirk: I don't really have to be grateful for change, because change is not what I do. Change is what my nature is. The whole life is a permanent change.

Look, you used to be an egg and a sperm in people who didn't know each other at all before. Crazy, right? And then you divided several times, then you became an embryo, then a baby and hung on the umbilical cord. Now you're sitting there with gray hair and glasses like me. It doesn't stop.

You don't actually have to be grateful for change. Change is a law of nature that happens whether I like it or not. Life is change and that's what we struggle with because we like to hold on to things and we don't like change sometimes. And strangely enough, not only when we are happy.

I know from my own history that for twenty years I didn't like the change of being sad either. I did a lot to keep it sad because I got used to it. But I can give thanks for active change from un-wholesome to wholesome. The beauty, gratitude is that change is possible at any moment. This means you can be happy, and you can be sad. But at the same time, it also means that when you are sad, you can be happy again.

You know my motto: "Happiness can be learned," and I stand by it a thousand percent. Because I myself have learned that it is possible. And I have taught this to thousands of people who confirm that it is possible. I'm not talking about the moment when dollar bills are raining from the ceiling and people are jumping around me with giant bottles of bubbly, all saying, "You're the greatest." Happiness is a moment that is incredibly quiet. It's not a shout of jubilation. There's no "I'm the greatest, I'm the best." There's the question, "And Dirk? Is something wrong right now?" And Dirk says, "No, nothing right now." Totally unspectacular. Happiness is actually quite unspectacular. Unfortunately, we all too often confuse it with satisfaction and the pursuit of extremes. ... Advertising suggests that happiness for us is supposedly when we consume a lot. That is madness.

Gratitude in your own life

Thomas: What role does gratitude play for you personally in life?

Dirk: A very big one. You know I had this aneurysm ten years ago. I'm incredibly grateful for the aneurysm because it solved all these issues and problems in my life. I had a tremendous amount of suffering and I'm very grateful that I had that amount of suffering. My teacher Thich Nhat Hanh once said, "Whoever wants to be truly happy must have truly understood the nature and essence of suffering."

I had a troubled history and extreme suffering, and I can only say, "Thank you for this. Because it has stimulated me." It made me understand that I have to actively change and not wait for someone to come along. Actually, I am grateful for everything. For everything. So many things have gone wrong in my life and I'm so grateful that I had them. You know why? I wouldn't have had that potential for learning if I didn't understand so many things. I'm really grateful for that.

What I'm also very grateful for is that I get to talk to so many people every day about love and compassion and forgiveness. That's a dream, that's really a dream and I get up every morning and I'm so grateful to myself that I can do that. And can do this interview with you right now. That makes me very grateful as well.

Learn gratitude

Thomas: How can we learn gratitude?

Dirk: That's a good question. First of all, you have to look for the way inside. Then you have to become aware that you consist of wholesome and unwholesome potentials, that is, things that are good for me and things that are actually maybe not so good for me at first glance.

Again, this really needs to be emphasized, only at first glance does suffering hurt. Isn't it great when suffering tells you, "Hey, Thomas, you need to pay attention to your anger, or your envy, or your lack of self-esteem, your sadness." Imagine if your body didn't tell you that, then you would just go down the drains without understanding why. It's great when your body produces a phrase like "I'm sad." It is then a first symptom that I want to explore more deeply.

Thomas: Why is gratitude so important?

Dirk: Gratitude is important because then we stop clinging to and rejecting things. These, along with ignorance, are the main contributors to suffering. There are only three: attachment, rejection and ignorance.

For example, gratitude can help you deal with physical pain. When I sit there and have physical pain, I make myself aware that there are millions of people in this world who have the same pain or more pain. Then I practice compassion and wish for those people to overcome that pain. With this form of gratitude and compassion, I establish compassion and gratitude within myself and my own pain completely fades into the background. This is an example of a simple practice of what you can do with physical pain.

The same principle applies to emotional pain. To consciously practice love and compassion. Because then there is no more room for the other. That's not repressing, that's not positive thinking either, as some students unfortunately sometimes render it. Yesterday I had a woman who sent me a long email saying she was so happy to have learned about positive thinking from me. I already know what she meant, but that's not what I mean. Mindfulness is not positive thinking, it's not "happy talk." Mindfulness is conscious understanding that I can use gratitude to achieve a state of happiness, which is freedom from suffering. That is what is at the core.

Gratitude and sense

Thomas: How does gratitude help me be human and shape my life?

Dirk: Gratitude gives me a sense of purpose.

I live here in the Ahr Valley and I'm looking out of my office at a fantastic autumn landscape. There are so many wonders in life. How grateful can I be to be able to experience that, how grateful! You said earlier how much you love your children. Isn't it nice to be grateful that we have this ability to have such emotions, love, compassion, magnanimity?

I started writing essays when I was eleven or twelve, what is the meaning of life, why am I here, why was I born, why didn't anyone ask me if I even wanted this. Today I see things quite differently. Today I am deeply grateful that through my own suffering I have learned to talk about love and happiness. Whereas for twenty years I was always in the valley of tears.

Thomas: What else is important to you about gratitude?

Dirk: For me, that would be, on the one hand, that we have to cultivate something that I think we've all forgotten. That is truth, that is awareness, that is concentration - and by that I don't mean concentration on a computer game, not on an Excel spreadsheet, not on typing a book, not on watching a movie - but concentration in a direction that has become foreign to us. And that is within us.

The things that blink and beep and ring and want you to press some button on the outside, they haven't become less. The diversity of life on the job, how you can live, what models you can think of, what options there are, what you can see on the Internet, that you can travel around the world with your laptop and earn thousands of euros a month when you go on vacation. That's very tempting, sounds great at first. But you have to have the courage to do something like that. Most people don't have that. And that's why this inward focus is so important. To reflect on what I actually want at the end of the day. Some people say they want to be rich; others say they want to be famous. No, you know what you all want? To be happy.

Happiness is an emotional freedom to determine how it looks inside me. And when I simply determine how it looks in me, I need truth, I need concentration, I need respect for myself and I need mindfulness.

The non-judgment of everything that is there, that is the way. The goal is to establish in myself what belongs there or what is there anyway; that is love, that is compassion, to practice love when there is pain. That is joy in life and in growing and in practicing, also in failure and moderation. Moderation between "I want" and "I don't want," between attachment and rejection. To arrive at moderation in the middle: not to be sad at all, but not too much either. Not to be too happy, but also not too little. If you are too much happy, what direction is there? The downward one.

In principle, life is a collection of stimuli to which I must respond. External stimuli like internal stimuli, things from outside like internal thoughts. That is life. To react to all these impressions and sensations without being with myself, that is, awake, aware, concentrated and mindful, I will not be able to produce joy, love, compassion or moderation in myself. Actually, mindfulness is quite simple when I am awake, focused, aware in the present moment.

If I feel suffering, I practice love. Because then love is in me and no longer suffering. And if there is pain in me, I practice compassion. Because then there is compassion in me and not pain. When there is suffering in me, I practice joy so that I can practice love and compassion. Because then there is love, compassion and joy of growing in me. And if there is suffering in the sense of strong rejection or strong attachment, then I practice moderation, because then I have a chance to feel love, compassion and joy in me.

10. Dancing Life

“Nobody cares if you can’t dance. Just get up and dance!”
Dave Barry

Key points

- Life is like a dance. We just have to accept the invitation to dance, the invitation to live.
- Life is like a dance with different perspectives: (1) We dance life. (2) Life dances us. (3) Life dances with us. (4) We dance with life.
- In life, as in dance, the predictability, the future, arises in the present doing.
- I can only lead if the other person wants to follow and trusts me as the leader.
- For dance, as for life, it is important to know what role I should take, must take or want to take. This realization is a first important step for the dance opening and the design of life.
- Co-creation requires a dialogue between two dancers. It is a give and take in harmony and constant change.
- There is no perfect dance. It is an art that cannot be planned. What is needed is presence, intention, tension, music, space and time, which support and complement each other in the interplay.
- Without getting involved in life and the desire to actively shape it, there can be no dance.
- In dance, as in life, mistakes are part of the game. They are opportunities for interpretation, personal expression and learning.
- To experience flow, whether in dance or otherwise in life, you have to learn to let go and be in the here-and-now.
- Flow in dancing is an interplay of mind, body and spirit. Like life, it is multidimensional.



Footwork (Photo ©Joachim Kant | pixelio.de)

The first dance

It's one thing to start putting ideas and intentions into practice. On the one hand, we want it, we want to have fun and enjoy it. But the first step is difficult. What could go wrong? How do the others see me? Am I making a fool of myself? And, and, and. We have no shortage of excuses.

I remember the first time I went out dancing with friends. I had great desire, and then great doubts. Going to a dance floor for the first time was like jumping into cold water for me. Refreshing? No, not really. But the good thing about cold water is that you have to move. And eventually it gets warmer and you start to feel more comfortable. Later you realize that everything was not as bad as you feared. Your doubts, worries and fears dissolve, and you arrive at "dancing".

It's similar with trying out new things in life. All we want to do is make it easier, enjoy it, have a good time. Just like preparing for a first dance. Well, life is like a dance. We just have to accept the invitation to dance, the invitation to live.

Comparing life with a dance is not new. But there are definitely different interpretations. We can say: We dance life. Or vice versa: Life dances us. Life is a dance. Or: Life dances with us. Or finally: We dance with life.

No matter which interpretation you like, they all have in common that we compare life with a dance. Which role we can and want to take, we will clarify later.

Tango Argentino

Dancing is a broad term. There are both individual dances such as dancing in a disco, line dancing or square dancing with fixed step sequences and figures, formation dancing with a coordinated choreography or couple dancing. These are only a few examples.

For our purposes, let's take couple dancing as an analogy to life. Specifically, I would like to take Tango Argentino as an example.¹²⁰ The reason for this is simple. I started dancing Tango Argentino myself in the summer of 2016 and have come to love it. Tango has become one of my hobbies and passions.

Unlike standard dances in general and the standard tango of the World Dance Program (also known as "European tango"), Tango Argentino has little regulation. This means there are no fixed step sequences or formations. Tango Argentino is an improvisational dance. A dance evening, also known as a "*milonga*", is usually divided into sequences of three to four songs each, a *tanda*, interrupted by a short break, a *cortina*. The *cortina* is used for the dance couples to find each other for the next *tanda*. In other words, the dance couples usually stay together for only one *tanda*. Fixed partners are rather the exception - unless the couple wants it that way.

With each *tanda*, the dance couples have to find each other anew, adjust to each other. This can sometimes be a real challenge, but it is also what makes tango so appealing. Each dance partner has his or her own personal dance style. How the two individual dance styles can become one harmonious dance is the art and magic of tango.

Dialogue as a form of expression

As in other couple dances, in tango there is the role of the leading dancer and the role of the following dancer. Traditionally, the man takes the role of the leader and the woman takes the role of the follower. In the end, however, it is irrelevant who takes which role. In fact, it can be observed that some tango dancers master both roles and switch roles during a song or dance women with women and men with men.¹²¹

However, it would be a fallacy to assume that the leader takes the active role in the dance and the follower takes the passive role. Active and passive do not really exist in tango. Rather, it is about the intention of a movement and the response to that intention.

Let's take a closer look at the characteristics of the leading and following parts: At the beginning of a dance, both dancers meet and stand in front of each other. When the man (leader) takes the woman's hand (follower), he doesn't immediately run and hope that she will find an answer and set the "right" steps. Rather, both dancers face each other openly and invitingly.



Dance invitation (photo © Annelie Frank)

“Open and inviting” means that both dancers are standing straight and in their body axes, present, in the here-and-now, open to the other partner, and overall relaxed. In this position, the two dancers connect in a stable, but not fixed, dance embrace. The man and woman “lean” lightly against each other. Both dancers are touching, but each is standing on his or her own body axis.



Dance connection (photo © Annelie Frank)

Now it's up to the man to take the first step. However, it is not that he simply starts walking. Rather, he prepares the movement for it. It is an intention or invitation for a movement. Conversely, the woman awaits the leader's intention with a certain amount of anticipation. If man and woman are "connected" to each other, this intention can be felt by the woman as the follower and she in turn can initiate her movement. So, the woman feels which movement or step she has to set before the man has actually set the step. The intention of the movement of the leader is sufficient. So, it can come to the fact that it looks from the outside as if the woman begins with a movement before the man has made a step.



Dance opening (photo © Annelie Frank)

This interplay continues throughout the dance. The sequential order of intention and response merges more and more.

At the same time, the idea of leading and following is not quite right. It is not so much an action and reaction of two dancers. The notion of a “dialogue” between the leading and the following, between the intention of the leading and the anticipation and response of the following is a better description. In other words: intention and anticipation enable a creative dialogue of the dancers.

Through this dialogue of the two dancers, a dancing unity is ideally formed. There are two individual dancers who create a dance together and thus form a unity. It is a mutual give and take, without one side giving or taking more than the other. It is a Yin and Yang of dancing. Both are valuable on their own, but it is only when they interact with each other that the Yin and Yang form a whole.



Yin and Yang, symbol of unity

If I cannot lead, but the other side can follow, there is no dialogue and thus no dancing unity. Conversely, I can lead no matter how well - if the other side cannot or will not follow, it has little to do with dance and is rather a more or less coordinated movement of bodies to background music.

Dance Flow

A dance dialogue or the flow of dance cannot be planned beforehand, at best it can be prepared. In order for it to come into being, several factors need to come together: besides the intention and the interpretation or reaction to the intention, these are the dancing skills of the couple, the music, the spatial conditions and whether both dancers are able to be and act in the here-and-now. But even if all factors are right, I still can't predict 100% whether a dance flow or dance dialogue will occur.

The predictability, the future, arises in the present action. It is quite possible that both the man and the woman have ideas for the design of the dance. Ultimately, it depends on the moment when I can implement the idea, and on the milonga, that is, the dance floor with the other dance couples. But the idea alone is worth nothing if it can't be realized somehow.

I can also compare it with a talented painter who has many ideas and inspirations. Only, as long as he does not go to the canvas, takes a brush and color and starts to paint, no picture will be able to emerge. His thoughts would be bubbles, nothing more.

My first experience in a tango milonga

In the summer of 2016, I started with Tango Argentino. A few months later I dared to go to a Tango Milonga for the first time. It was such an impactful and formative event that I wrote an article about it the next day and published it on LinkedIn/Medium and my blog¹²².

"Last week I finally went to my first milonga (Tango Argentino). Was I nervous? Yes, I was. I had only started learning tango a few months ago, consider myself a complete beginner (I am), didn't want to make a fool of myself, didn't want to hurt anyone on the dance floor (it's pretty crowded), knew and could only do a few step sequences (compared to what the experienced dancers were showing on the dance floor), ... And the list goes on and on. Today I know it was and is a list of excuses, lame excuses.

How was my first milonga?

Especially at the beginning, I felt more like a cow on the ice. My brain was mushy, no, empty. It seemed as if I had forgotten everything I had learned in my dance lessons. I felt like a stone in a storm and couldn't move an inch. At the same time, my head was full of, well, I don't know what it was - empty, heat, worry, fear?

Break the ice

Fortunately, I was not alone. The first dance with my wife was actually quite passable. We were both nervous. And yet we survived. "Time to sit down and rest, recover, refresh," I thought. But as I sat down, a friend asked me to dance with her. Oops. Here it was again: anxiety crawling up my stomach, my brain turning to mush.

On the other hand, my dance partner was very understanding, patient and encouraging. I think we did quite well. At least no one got hurt. The first ice was broken.

In search of a dance flow

Time just flew by. Soon three hours had passed. I still felt "strange," but no longer like a cow on ice, perhaps more like a dog on ice.

And then there were three or four dances when time stood still for me. When suddenly I let go of all pressure, all worries and thoughts, and all I did was listen to the music and dance with my partner. Our steps and movements naturally flew. It was like sailing on a smooth sea. And with it came joy, relaxation, big inner smiles and grins. We were both stunned and perplexed. Wonderful.

Okay, three to four dances out of 20 or more is not that much. But it was more than enough to motivate us to plan our next milonga. And we are really looking forward to it. Will it be better? Possibly, no, probably, because the first milonga revealed something magical.

The secret of the dance flow

I realized that I still have a lot to learn. Technically? Yes. But it's more about letting go, relaxing, listening to the music, going with the flow, looking for free spaces and moving in them, being in the moment. Letting go and being and going with the moment. No, that seems to be *the* key to experiencing and enjoying joy and flow on the dance floor.

This was and is the outstanding insight from my first milonga - both about tango and about life.

Tango and life

People say that tango is a reflection of life. This is so true. And it's not just the milongas, it's also the tango lessons, the learning experiences, the excitement, motivation, joy, frustration, depression, concerns, worries, fears. Tango can teach you a lot about your attitude and practice in life, about your partnerships, your love, your attitude, your flow (or lack thereof), your being. It drastically reveals your state of being in life.

If the tango is not quite flowing yet, review your current lifestyle, family life, friendships, partnerships and professional environment. Are you limiting your thinking, trying to structure, plan and control it? This can sometimes work and produce satisfying results. But if you really want to dance in your flow, you have to let go of limiting thoughts, worries and fears. Jump into the deep end, show and express who you are in this moment. In doing so, it may very well not be "perfect" in the eyes of some onlookers and the biggest critic (which is probably yourself).

Motivation to be human

We are human beings with imperfections, which in turn make us perfect. We are not machines. Freeing yourself from false expectations and simply playing like a child again is refreshing and rewarding like nothing else. Because it helps you to be human and to find and be yourself again.

So, what are you waiting for?! Go out and find your tango and dance it!

It takes two to tango

Let us return to the analogy of life as a dance and the question of who is asking whom to dance, who is leading, who is following.

In the end, it doesn't matter how we define this. Because what we can learn from the analogy is that a dance flow, a work of dance art, always requires two dancers who engage with each other, communicate with each other, complement each other and thus form something new. Co-creation, as it is called, requires a dialogue between two dancers. It is a give and take in harmony and constant change. A dance cannot be perfectly planned. It is an art that cannot be planned. What is needed is presence, intention, tension, music, space and time, which support and complement each other in the interplay. In addition, it requires clear leadership with simultaneous openness and trust of the follower towards the leader. Supposed mistakes are part of improvisational dance – they are not so much mistakes as chances for interpretation, for personal expression and, of course, for learning.

Let's go through different ways of interpreting the analogy of life as a dance:

- Option 1: We dance life. That is, we lead life. Life follows our intention. What comes out of this depends on our intention and the response of life to our actions.
- Option 2: Life dances us. In other words, life leads us. We respond to the impulses of life and thus shape the dance of life. The prerequisite is that we engage with life, have a certain tension and anticipation, and let a dialogue develop together.

In both Option 1 and Option 2, we have to engage and communicate with the other dancer, enter into a dialogue with them, be in the here-and-now. Design does not result from working off a plan, but in doing in the here-and-now in interaction with the external and internal circumstances. That is life. That is dance.

Another possible interpretation of the dance analogy is as follows:

- Option 3: Life dances with us. Life is the dance and we are the dancers.
- Option 4: We dance with life. We interact with life on the dance floor.

Again, both Option 3 and Option 4 are ultimately about creating the dance together. Without engaging with life and wanting to actively shape it, no dance. Dance is a tool to express ourselves. Alone, that is, if we block out life and only want to function like a machine, there is no dance. Thus, “It always takes two to tango.”

“Tango is real life “

On the sidelines of a fall 2019 tango marathon, I had the opportunity to talk with two dancers known worldwide in the Tango scene, Tango Maestro Horacio from Buenos Aires and Tango Maestra Cecilia Berra from Barcelona, about their insights on tango.



Cecilia Berra and Horacio Godoy (Source: Cecilia Berra)

The essence of tango

Thomas: What is the essence of tango?

Cecilia: The essence of tango is the social sharing part within the milonga with people embracing and dancing.

Horacio : I think we are coming back for the old times. ... It's not about the Internet, television or the like, but to live life in reality. Like 200, 1000 or even 2000 years ago, to talk face to face. ... It is real life.

Tango as a mirror of life

Thomas: How does tango relate to our normal lives? What can we learn from tango?

Cecilia: Everything. The social part that is lived in the milonga corresponds to what we experience in daily life. I feel that every personality is concentrated and amplified in the milonga. If someone is jealous, it is noticed; if someone is arrogant, it is noticed. In tango you learn to live different attitudes toward people, which you will find later in the day.

Horacio: It's a real life. I mean, how many times have you hugged your mother, your sister, or someone in your family that you really love? If you don't add up all the hugs, a hug doesn't last more than a few seconds. Then in your whole life, you may have hugged your mother for ten minutes.

In real life, we say, "Hi, Mom, how are you?" and touch her on her shoulder and that's it. Or when we meet a friend with whom we are having coffee, we touch him even more briefly or not at all.

And in the tango, for the first time in your life, you hug a woman for ten minutes. So, if you dance two tandas with her, you will hug a new lady longer than your mother in your whole life.

The art of tango

Thomas: Is tango an art and can we learn this art?

Horacio: I think this is the most difficult step. I think it's the last step. You can see people doing sports on the dance floor or how the spirit moves bodies. But it's really difficult to cross the line to create art or to be an artist. I think ... maybe one in 100,000 people could be an artist. But we can often touch art. But it's very difficult. It's the last step for me.

Cecilia: I don't know if I'll be an artist in two days; I don't know if I'll be a teacher in two days. It's a question of time, but it's nice to start the search.

"In the tango itself you always dance your personality"

Now the truth is that both Horacio and Cecilia live more or less exclusively for tango. I wanted to follow up on their statements and spoke with my own dance teacher Isabella Bayer from the Mannheim Tango School "Tango Flores".



Isabella Bayer

Tango as a mirror of life

Thomas: In your experience, to what extent does tango reflect life?

Isabella: You can interpret everything and nothing into tango. When you start tango or when you dance tango, you have your ups and downs, just like in life.

Tango shows who you really are. You can use tango to get into social contact. You can be whatever you want at the milonga first. Nobody cares what you are in your real life, what job you do, if you are a father or single or whatever. And you can wear whatever you want. You can slip into another shell, but you are still you. In tango, you always end up dancing your personality. For example, if you're shy, you might dance shyly. Sure, you can change that over time, just like you can work on your personality. But you first dance the way you are. And that comes right out. Tango is very honest in this respect.

The special thing about tango

Thomas: What is special about tango compared to other dances?

Isabella: Tango just works without me having to learn any steps or choreography at the beginning. Sure, with time you want to get better. You work on your technique, become more sensitive. But compared to other dances, with tango it's easy to let something emerge from the moment. In other dances you have more formalized things. You have more distance from the person you're dancing with.

In tango there is the magic of the embrace. It is much more than a dance posture. It is a real embrace. It's very fitting to say that tango is life. Life wants to embrace us, too. But you have to let it. And that, I think, is the first challenge. You have to let someone into your proximity, and you also have to want to embrace the other person. Because only then can you really dance. We can practice steps and dance them. We then do technique, but we don't really dance yet.

Lead and follow

Thomas: What does leadership mean in tango and what does it require?

Isabella: When you are in the leading role, it is classically your job to safely navigate the lady across the dance floor and make the lady look good while dancing. That is, you give clarity in what you are inviting her to do. She can accept or decline the invitation. If she declines, you'll have to reschedule.

The famous tango dancer Carlos Gavito said that as a man you must accept that the lady is the queen. And only when she is the queen, you can be the king.

Conversely, a lady must want to follow you. Otherwise, leading will not work. She must get involved with you and trust you in a certain way. If the trust is not there, you will notice it immediately in the dance. It falters. Dancing is a togetherness, a dialogue between the leader and the follower, with a clear distribution of roles.

Tango flow

Thomas: What do you mean by a "tango flow"? How do we get into this flow?

Isabella: In general, flow is when you are completely absorbed in the moment, when you are in the moment. It's the same with tango. It's just that you're not alone, but with someone. You can't force the flow or make it happen. It happens when you let go. For flow to happen, everything has to fit together: the music, your form on the day, your biochemistry. Flow has something of a trance. You have to block out all the other stuff. When the flow is there, it's just you, the partner, the music, the feeling, the movement as such. And the rest is not relevant, is not there, like in a fog.

And not all flow is the same. I can also get into flow during other activities. When I'm programming, for example, I sometimes get into a flow. The big difference to flow in tango is that when I'm programming, I feel pretty drained afterwards, but not in tango. I am full of energy afterwards. In tango there is the interaction of mind, body, soul. In programming it is the head. In this respect, the tango flow is multidimensional.

Technique - the language of tango

Thomas: How do you express yourself in tango?

Isabella: To express yourself in tango, you want to have a repertoire of techniques to express in movement what you hear in the music, what you might feel in that moment. Technique is like a language. The bigger your vocabulary, the better you can express yourself with it. But it can still be difficult. Because in the end, no one can teach you the feeling you want to express. You have to find it yourself. That's art. In other words, you can learn techniques to be creative in the moment. But, as with flow, you can't force it, you have to let go.

How do I continue to shape the dance?

For dance, as for life, it is important to know what role I should, must or want to take. The intention is a first important step for the opening of the dance and the shaping of life. But the intention alone is not enough. Just as little as a painter's idea for a new painting. Without suitable tools and without work, nothing will be able to emerge that the viewer can see, let alone admire.

Thus, in Part 3 of the book, we turn to the task of shaping our work. We explore the question of how we can manage to bring our humanity into our daily lives in general and into work in particular.

Human Business has two dimensions: the human dimension and the business dimension. We looked at the human dimension in part 2. Part 1 and Part 3 both deal with the dimensions of business. In Part 1, we introduced the structures of Human Business. In Part 3, we learn about different tools for designing Human Business in practice. Or, to return to the analogy of dance: We will learn a set of techniques and rules that will help us to design the dance. Therefore: let's tango on.

Further ideas and exercises

- If you don't dance yet, sign up for a dance class.
- If you already dance, practice the other role, too. So, if you have led so far, take the role of the following - or vice versa.
From that, how can you apply these experiences to your life?
- Find out to what extent you are shaping your dance - and/or your life - as a dialogue, or allowing it to be shaped.



Part 3:
Shaping Our Future

“We must accept that the world is ... strange and unpredictable, which at the same time provides scope for creativity and unpredictable leaps in development. The future is indeterminate, it is what we create out of the past and present. It is not a thing, but a doing: it comes into being by our ‘futuring’ it.”

Anders Indset,
Norwegian philosopher and futurologist

In Part 3, we take the insights from Part 2 and apply them to how we can shape our future in general and our world of work in particular.

The MVP model, which we will explore in Chapter 11, serves as an initial introduction. “MVP” stands for motivation, vision and practice. Motivation drives our work, vision focuses on the future, and practice connects past and future in present actions. The MVP model explains how we can align our practice, i.e., our actions in the present with our motivation as the driver of our actions and with our vision for the future. This interaction is a valuable foundation for shaping our lives, whether in our personal lives or in our professional lives.

That this is not an academic abstract is shown by an example of how the MVP model was successfully applied in a conference (Chapter 12). In addition to the practicality of the MVP model, this conference showed how crucial a holistic learning environment that offers activities for mind, heart and body is for shaping our future. It is an environment that opens spaces in which we can unleash our human potential and creativity at the individual, couple, or group level.

What exactly these human creative spaces look like, and how we can open and fill them, is the subject of Chapter 13. These spaces are characterized by an atmosphere of trust, openness and willingness to learn. If we shape these spaces together with fellow human beings, a co-creative environment emerges in which joint experimentation and design enable a deep and lasting understanding of something new.

An ancient principle of human interaction serves as orientation for this interplay: the “Golden Rule”. The Golden Rule calls on us to treat people and our planet as we would like to be treated. This ancient, universal rule transcends religions and is more relevant today than ever. It helps take the focus away from artificial machines and back to us humans and our environment. This makes it a central value of Human Business.

In an interview, Kim Polman, founder of Reboot the Future, talks about individuals and businesses who are already applying the Golden Rule and thus contribute to sustainable change in their environments. Such people encourage us to do the same. The only prerequisite is that we rediscover our own human being and live accordingly.



11. The MVP Model

“The question is not, ‘Are you worthy enough to achieve your goals?’

The question is, ‘Are your goals worthy enough of you?’”

Vishin Lakhiani,
Founder of Mindvalley

Key points

- MVP stands for motivation, vision and practice. Motivation is our driver, vision is directed towards the future, practice connects past and future in present action.
- We need a creative tension between vision and motivation in order to act sustainably.
- If our practice, that is, our actions in the present, correspond to both our motivation and our vision, we bring together past (motivation), present (practice) and future (vision). They become one.
- Personal clarity about our own practice in tandem with motivation and vision is a valuable foundation for shaping our lives.
- The MVP model is applicable to us personally as well as at work, in projects and when working in teams. If there is an overlap between the MVPs of individuals, the project and the team as a whole, this can spark “wow projects”. These are projects that add sustainable value, matter, make a difference, and leave “a legacy.”

Translating words into actions

Where do we start when we want to turn our words into actions? You may think that the other person should start. But why? This is not about them or the other person. It is about us. And only we ourselves can take the first step. Therefore, in this chapter we will learn how to translate our realization of what we really want, what motivates us, into concrete actions. We will learn this for three dimensions.

1. **Dimension 1 - for yourself:** So, what specifically can you do to translate your insight? How can you pursue your motivation in concrete activities?
2. **Dimension 2 - at work and in projects:** How can you apply the insight in work? In concrete terms, how would you set up a project according to the principles we will learn about in the first dimension?
3. **Dimension 3 - in the team:** How do you work in the team? That is, how can we develop a team that works according to the values and principles of the first two dimensions?

Your personal MVP

The first questions

Let's start with you. The core question that needs to be answered is:

- What do you want?

Simple, isn't it? Well, I can imagine that some people can be overwhelmed by this question alone. That is why I would like to expand the core question. The following questions belong to this "category" and can help us to find out what we really want deep inside, in our heart and being:

- What don't you want?
- What is your problem or challenge at the moment?
- What's stopping you from being yourself?
- What's bothering you?

Some answers may already come to you in your head. But this is not about mental work. So, take a piece of paper and write down your answers to one, a few, or all of the questions. Now. Do it. And don't read any further until you've done it.

Experiment

So, have you written down your answers yet? Yes? That's great. No? Well, that's okay, too, because you're sure to come up with answers in the next exercise.

The following exercise will help you start the flow of ideas. It doesn't matter if you've already found answers to the questions above or if you've struggled with them.

For this exercise, take a white sheet of paper. Fold it lengthwise once in the middle. If you like, you can also draw a line along the fold line. At the top of the long side, write “Personal, Family, Friends” on the left side. On the right side write “Profession, Work, Society”.

You did? Good, great. Now get a timer and set it for five minutes. Once you’ve done that, I’ll give you the question to answer in the next five minutes. When you get the question, start writing right away. The faster and the more you write, the better. Spelling or grammar doesn’t matter. It’s your paper, and only you will read it. You can write however you want. Finished? Good.

Please answer the following question: What do you want to achieve or accomplish

- a) personally, from the bottom of your heart and
- b) professionally,

when you know that you only have three years to live from today?

Your five minutes start now.

When I heard this question for the first time, I was surprised and speechless¹²³- maybe you felt the same way. Because quite honestly, I hadn’t expected such a question. The three-year period was long enough to get some things down on paper. And yet it was more than finite. It helped me write down the most important things that came to mind. And it helped me prioritize. Not a bad thing, either. Because in the last three years of my life, I don’t want to get bogged down at all. After all, the question was what I wanted to have achieved within three years, not what I wanted to work on everywhere.

A twist on the exercise that you can do is to now put your note in an envelope. Seal the envelope. As the sender and address, write your address on the envelope. At the top right, where the stamp goes, write today’s date plus three years. For example, if today is December 15, 2020, write December 15, 2023 in the upper right corner. Now give the letter to a person you trust and ask them to send you this letter in three years. Either hand it to them personally or put it in the mail. Done. That’s it.

Note: For our purpose in this chapter, you will still need your list. If you like, copy the list for the next exercises and put the other list in the envelope.

In the next step, we want to go one level deeper. Deeper in that we want to take another look at your motivation. We want to find out what really, really drives, moves and motivates you. Why this is so important, you will learn in the next sections.

Drill deeper

Here we go. For this exercise, please pick one of your answers from the list in the previous exercise. It doesn't matter if it's an answer from the left (personal) or right (professional) column. Choose something that is really important and close to your heart right now. Did you do it? Good.

Now please take a new sheet of paper. At the top, write your chosen answer. Now there is a new set of questions. Again, the idea is that you write down your answers as quickly as possible.

Here are the questions:

1. **First step:** If the thing or person or whatever you wrote down is so important to you, why is it so? Please write down your answer now.
2. **Second step:** If this is so important to you, that is, the answer to the previous answer, why is this so important to you? Please write down your answer now.
3. **Third step:** If this is so important to you, that is, the answer to the previous answer, why is this so important to you? Please write down your answer now.
4. **Fourth step:** If this is so important to you, that is, the answer to the previous answer, why is this so important to you? Please write down your answer now.

5. **Fifth step:** If this is so important to you, that is, the answer to the previous answer, why is this so important to you? Please write down your answer now.
6. **Sixth step:** If this is so important to you, that is, the answer to the previous answer, why is this so important to you? Please write down your answer now.
7. **Seventh step:** If this is so important to you, that is, the answer to the previous answer, why is this so important to you? Please write down your answer now.

Where are you now?

Yes, it's important that you drill deeper. It's possible that after the second or third question you had trouble finding an answer. Then drill deeper into yourself and try to find an answer.

Most of us will leave the "outer" level from the third, fourth or sometimes even the fifth question. From then on it becomes really personal, emotional, heart-touching, maybe even spiritual. The question sequence allows us to go deeper inside ourselves and find out what is really going on deep inside. To find out what is important for us.

Example: Why do I want to write this book?

I want to share what I wrote down about why it was important to me to write this book in the spring of 2019.

1. Level: In the next three years, I would like to have written a book about Human Business and being human in the digital age. Why is this so important to me?
2. Level: I want to sort out my thoughts and ideas.
3. Level: I would like to make it concrete and clarify it for myself.
4. Level: I want to be able to describe them as simply as possible.
5. Level: I want to be able to bring them into my life and work.
6. Level: I believe this will help me experience and share more wow moments.
7. Level: These wow moments help me to be one with myself, to just be human.

Accordingly, the deeper motivation for me to write the book is that I just want to be one with myself, just be human, as I described in Part 2.

Example: Why do I want to publish my book?

I would like to share a second example. This time, I'd like to slightly modify the question I just asked. "Why do I want this book published within three years?"

1. Level: In the next three years, I would like to have successfully published a book about Human Business and being human in the digital age. Why is this so important to me?
2. Level: I want to share my ideas and thoughts with others.
3. Level: I would like to give them impetus.
4. Level: I want to make a positive difference.
5. Level: Because the subject is close to my heart.
6. Level: So far, I have done far too little that is close to my heart. I want to break this cycle.
7. Level: I want to be more one with my heart, to give my heart space and time and a voice and thus live, act, be authentic.

As you can see, in this case the answers have sort of flowed together.

What does it look like for you? If you want to find out, repeat the exercise with several of your answers and compare them with each other.

Find out if there are one or more great common denominators. These are signs of your true, deeper motivation. Find it out, because we want to work with it in the next step.

What does motivation mean for implementation?

On the way to implementing what you really want, it is first important to know what you actually want. That's why we just did the exercises. When you have done them, you will have one or two ideas about yourself. But it may also be that the exercises have raised more questions than answers. That's okay, too. It shows that there are deeper questions that are bothering you and to which you are looking for answers.

If you already have such a question, fine. If not, that is, if instead of a question you have a clear description or justification of your motivation, ask yourself: Have you achieved this yet? If not, what's stopping you from living this every day or orienting yourself to it?

Next, ask yourself the question: Who is affected by this? Is it just you or maybe your fellow human beings?

Now answer the question: What happens if nothing happens? In other words: What happens if you cannot fulfill your motivation from the seventh level or if you can never find an answer to the question you encountered on the seventh level?

Again, write down your answers, at least in keywords.

You may not feel so great and euphoric now. Who wants to throw away the motivation we just figured out right away? I certainly don't. The thought alone fills me with frustration, anger and inner pain.

And it is precisely this pain that we need in order to become active. Because if we don't feel pain, if we don't see a real need for change, we will rarely become active.

Vision: What questions can I ask?

However, we will quickly leave this pain. There are a number of questions again for this.

Take the motivation from the previous exercise or the pain and now ask yourself the following question: What would be the ideal state for you in terms of motivation or pain? In other words: How would it feel for you if you could live your motivation 100%? Or in the case of pain, how would it feel for you if the pain were completely gone? What would be exactly the opposite of that, nirvana, so to speak?

Imagine this ideal state pictorially and emotionally. If you can't think of any images, try using adjectives. It doesn't matter if you can find words for it. After all, it is an exercise for you. Try to visualize and feel this ideal state in your mind or heart as accurately as possible. Enjoy it as if it were already there. If possible, make some notes about it.

When you have done this, answer the question: Who will "benefit" from this ideal state? Is it you alone or also your fellow men? Again, make some notes.

Finally, answer the question: how will those you named in your answer to the previous question benefit from the ideal state?

What is creative tension?

There may be worlds between the answers to the questions of motivation and those of vision. And that is a good thing. Peter Senge describes this as "creative tension." In his book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990)¹²⁴, he describes a creative tension as follows:

Imagine you are holding a rubber band between your hands. Or, if you have one, get it and hold one end of each with one hand. If you like, put it around your wrists. Now move your hands away from each other. What will happen is that the rubber band will stretch. The further your hands move away from each other, the greater the tension. There are several ways to release this tension.

a) You move your hands further away from each other until the rubber band breaks. (Certainly not so nice, because possibly painful).

b) You move one hand towards the other - so the tension is released.

c) You keep your hands at the same distance. The tension remains the same and with time you get used to the pain of tension.

The distance between motivation and vision is like the two hands. The greater the distance, the greater the tension. Senge calls this “creative” tension. “Creative” because the tension moves one to move, to resolve the tension. In the case of motivation and vision, this would be a movement toward vision or motivation - or just a constant tension. Both are possible.

As we move toward motivation, we continue to deal with it. Well, it can be quite fulfilling to know what drives you. However, we don't really move then. We have gained valuable insights. But they remain worthless if we don't do anything with them, if we don't put them into practice.

Similarly, when we see the tension between motivation and vision, we still don't move. We get used to the pain and frustration that there is a big gap between our motivation and an ideal state, but we don't dare to take a first step towards the vision. This is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, we have recognized our motivation and can see or imagine how beautiful it would be in an ideal state. But then we just don't move. In this respect, this cannot resolve the tension.

Finally, the movement towards the vision remains. With the realization of motivation, we move toward the vision. We allow ourselves to be pulled by the vision, so to speak. We use the creative tension to get to the vision. We take our motivation - figuratively speaking, this would be the one hand - with us. Once motivation and vision are together, the tension is resolved.

Practice

In our picture of the two hands and the rubber band, everything seems quite easy. But what does it look like in practice? Here, too, a question helps us. When we are both aware of our motivation and have a clear vision, the question we want to ask ourselves is: What would you do next if you were allowed to assume that the ideal state, your vision, was achievable?

So, it's not the question of what steps would all be required to get to the vision. It is the question of the next, most immediate and obvious step - practice.

When John F. Kennedy promised the American people at the beginning of the 1960s that he would put a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth by the end of the decade, they had no idea how that could be possible. Kennedy's promise was a vision. But a vision that became a north star or driver. For there was also a common motivation among the population. Shortly before, the Soviets had launched a satellite into space. Americans seemed to be falling behind in the race to explore space. This was the so-called Sputnik shock.¹²⁵ The shock ran deep, uniting Americans. It was a pain felt by all. When Kennedy spoke of a moon landing, this vision was an alleviation of the pain. Both motivation and vision were carried by many people. What would be necessary to realize the vision was not yet known. But it spurred the American people to research and to strive, taking one step after the other. Finally, in 1969, the vision became reality.

Let's get back to practice. Now ask yourself the question: What would you do next if you thought your vision was achievable? Take a few minutes and write down your thoughts and ideas.

Once you've done that and written down, say, ten or maybe even more possible activities, there's still the question of which one to start with. The choice should be easier for you if you select the activities that go along with both your motivation and your vision. In other words, choose the activities that both satisfy your motivation and contribute to your vision. These activities have the highest energy for you.

If we describe motivation, vision and practice as three different circles, we want to move in the space where the circles intersect.



Intersection of motivation, vision and practice

If we pursue activities that conform to both our motivation and our vision, we have the highest energy for ourselves and our activities. This is the best way to resolve the creative tension between motivation and vision.

Ideally, motivation, vision and practice coincide completely. Perhaps this really is a nirvana state. However, the reality is probably more that this is not (yet) the case and the circles are constantly in motion. Not everything we want (motivation) goes hand in hand with an ideal state (vision) and certainly not with possible activities (practice).

In this respect, it makes sense to check to what extent your daily activities satisfy your motivation and nourish your vision. If there is no intersection, you are in an imbalance.

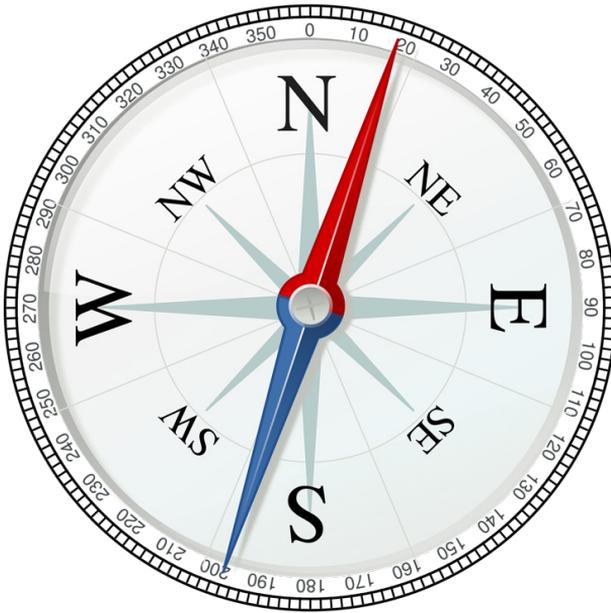


Imbalance of motivation, vision and practice

If there is already an intersection of motivation and vision, this is a good first step. Now all that's left is for your actions to follow. Motivation and vision take place in our mind and heart. If we want them to become reality, we must act, our activities must lead towards them.

Practice as orientation

Practice, that is, our actions and our activities, plays an important role in ensuring the greatest possible intersection. In a sense, it brings the dynamic to these three sub-areas of motivation, vision and practice. While motivation provides a starting point or foundation, vision shows us the general direction. In a sense, motivation and vision are a kind of compass needle. Motivation (south direction) shows where we are coming from. By looking back, we have a point of reference, our starting point. The vision (north direction), points to where we want to go - that is also a point of orientation. The practice itself is a concrete step towards the vision.



Compass (Source: OpenClipArt-Vectors on Pixabay)

Figuratively speaking, we set signs with our practice for our path towards the vision - similar to leaving signs for us in a dark forest, so that should we decide to turn back, we can find our way home again. At the same time, when we turn around, the signs give us an idea of how far we have gone.

In other words, with our practice, driven by our motivation, we move towards our vision. At the same time, we set signs on our path with our actions and can thus ensure that we are still connected to our motivation. Thus, our practice serves both as a movement toward our vision and as an orientation to where we are coming from and why we have chosen the path we have.

Let's make this concrete: Think about what activities are coming up in the week ahead. What goals do you want to achieve? These can be both content and time goals. Make sure they are activities that can bring you a small step closer to your vision. Choose activities that can be completed in a week. When you have achieved the

goals, you will feel that you have accomplished something. If you did not achieve a goal, you will get valuable feedback on whether you are on track, whether a goal has changed, whether other goals or activities have become more important and displaced your original goals.

After a week, take stock of what you've accomplished. Compare your goals with the actual results. And compare whether the activity is in line with your motivation and has brought you further towards the vision.

If you repeat this over several weeks - setting goals each week and checking after a week whether and to what extent you have achieved them - you can quickly find out whether your actions actually match your motivation, and if you are still moving in the direction of your vision. If not, this could be a wake-up call to review and adjust your practice and try something different, for example. This is assuming you take your motivations and vision seriously, which we will assume at this point.

The weekly exercise of planning and reflecting on your practice takes little time. At the same time, it is a valuable investment in your own satisfaction and in shaping your future.¹²⁶

Harmony of past, present and future

If your activities are aligned with your motivation and vision, it allows you to act much more in the here-and-now. In terms of time, our motivation is shaped by past experiences. Vision points to the future. If our practice, that is, our actions in the present, correspond to both our motivation and our vision, we bring together past (motivation), present (practice) and future (vision). They become one. Without taking action, motivation and vision stand by themselves. They may bring valuable insights, but they exist only in our minds and/or hearts. Only when we become active do they, and thus we, become alive. How alive depends on the harmony of our actions with our motivation and vision.

Personal clarity about our own practice, in tandem with motivation and vision, is a valuable foundation for shaping our lives - both personal and professional. Next, let's look at how we can find and develop similar clarity in work.

MVP for my work and projects

Projects in the VUCA world

Analogous to your personal MVP, we now want to develop MVPs for your work. Work” is a broad term. It can refer to the economy as a whole, companies and organizations, and projects as well as routine activities. For now, we will focus on projects as a kind of microcosm of work.

One of the main characteristics of projects is that they are temporary. They are not recurring activities. Rather, a result is to be delivered at time x, whatever the result may be. This could be an actual result in the form of a product or service, or the answer to a question that triggered the project.

In the VUCA world in which we find ourselves, projects are taking on an increasingly important role. Projects make it possible to complete new things quickly and within a manageable time frame or to provide answers to questions. Routine activities will not cease to exist in the VUCA world. But it is questionable whether and to what extent routine activities will help to shape the future. Routine activities presuppose that the framework conditions do not change, that they are stable. So, it is not surprising that they are already being performed by machines today - this trend will certainly continue.

Project - Motivation

Analogous to the approach in the previous section, in which we asked ourselves what we want in the first place, the question at the beginning of a project is what we want to achieve. This assumes that there is either a problem or a challenge or a question that we want to answer.

So, when you set up a project, try less to think in terms of solutions.¹²⁷ This may lead you down the wrong path. First, ask yourself what the problem is that the project is supposed to address. And then take the description of the problem or problems and ask yourself why this is a problem or why it is so important to you.¹²⁸

Remember that for your own motivation you asked up to seven times why something is important to you or why a problem is a problem. The same is true for the project. Don't try to describe the symptom of a problem. Drill deeper to find out what the real cause of the problem or the real driver of your project is.

In a second step, answer the question of who is affected.

And finally, ask yourself what could happen if nothing happens. That is, if the problem persists and you do nothing about it, or if you have identified the driver of the project, but nothing happens.

Drilling deeper, digging around in a problem is anything but a nice occupation. The point here is to better understand the problem in its scope and to understand why it is worth tackling the problem. The more honest and transparent your approach, the better. And the more dramatic the problem, the more likely you are to want to take action and solve the problem. No matter how.

Project - Vision

Formulating a vision for your project requires that you know what you want. In other words: What would be the ideal state if the problem no longer existed? What is the opposite of the problem? Or what would be the ideal state if the driver(s) of your project fully led to a new and better reality?

The description of the ideal state is not about the description of a solution. This is still to be worked out and is possibly still unknown and part of the project. The ideal state is just that: an ideal state.

Once you have described this, be clear about who benefits from this ideal state and how.

As a counterpoint to the motivation of the project, the ideal state, the vision, can be very far away from the problem or driver of the project. The further, the greater the "creative tension".

Project - Practice

The practice, i.e., the project, helps to resolve this creative tension. The question to ask is: If the ideal state can eventually be realized, what would be a possible step toward it? That step is your project. In other words, your project is a small step toward the vision.

The question you may be asking yourself at this point is how concretely this step should or must look. The more precisely you can describe it, the easier it is to actually take it. In project management jargon, it is said that a project goal should be “SMART”. “SMART” stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timeboxed. If we are in uncharted territory, we can turn “SMART” into “SMARTER,” where the E stands for exciting and the R at the end stands for risky.¹²⁹ By expanding the SMART concept, we characterize the project from the outset as a “playground” or “laboratory” - the point is to discover and implement something new.

Value creation in projects

Whether your project goals are SMART or SMARTER, make sure they are consistent with the motivation and vision of the project.

That should be self-evident. But over the years I have repeatedly experienced that this is not the case. Even worse, in most projects neither the motivation nor the vision is clear. This is more than questionable. Of course, I can set up and realize a project and achieve its goals. But projects never exist in a vacuum. They have a connection to other areas - be it other projects or plans in a company or ongoing activities.

If you find that a project goal is incompatible with motivation and/or vision, don't do it. That is, don't start the project at all.



Motivation, vision and project in a vacuum

Project Profile

In my years as a project manager, I have found that it is helpful to create a project charter right at the beginning or immediately prior to the start of a project that outlines the goals and scope. The goal of creating a project outline or charter is to ensure that all project stakeholders have the same understanding of the goals and scope of the project and align their expectations.

A project profile does not have to be an endless document. It is better and easier to summarize the most important points on a single page. Specifically, a charter provides information on the following topics:

- Motivation and vision of the project
- Expected or desired project results
- Project delimitation: What is not part of the project, i.e., what is out of scope?
- Who are the customers/end users of the project deliverable?
- Who are the stakeholders in the project? Or, which groups or departments need to be involved in the project, even if they are not officially project team members?

- What are the measurable, non-measurable, and potentially controversial goals of the project?
- What are the measurable, non-measurable, and potentially controversial benefits of the project?
- When is the desired completion date for the project?
- When is the earliest date the project can generate benefits?
- What is the project priority?
- How is it planned to involve the customer(s) in the project?
- Who is a member of the project team?
- Who is responsible for coordinating the project? Who is the project manager?
- Who is the project decision maker or sponsor?
- What other constraints or guidelines are there that need to be considered in the project?
- What strengths can the project leverage?
- What weaknesses may impede the project?
- What opportunities may arise in the future from the results or benefits of the project?
- What could have a negative impact on the outcomes or benefits of the project?
- Date of the official adoption of the project charter
- Date of possible updates of the charter

The following figure is an example of a possible template for a project charter, which can be adapted depending on the project objective and scope:

[Name of Project or Initiative]

Motivation What is the (real) problem? Who is affected by it? What are the impacts? What happens if nothing changes?		Vision What would be the ideal state? What benefits or added value can we expect? Who benefits from this?	
Expected project results or deliverables		Out-of-scope for project	
Customer(s) / User(s)		Stakeholders & organizational units to be involved in project	
Measurables Objectives		Measurable Benefits	
Qualitative Goals		Qualitative Benefits	
Controversial Goals		Controversial Benefits	
Target End Date		Earliest Benefit Date	
Project Priority [High, Medium, Low]		Planned customer(s) / user(s) involvement	
Project Team		Project Lead / Manager (or similar)	
Project Sponsor		Policy Guidelines / Restrictions to be accounted for	
Strengths What are our strongest points that we can use in this project?		Opportunities What opportunities could open up in the future through the deliverables or benefits of this project?	
Weaknesses What are the weakest points that could hinder this project?		Threats What could have a negative impact on the deliverables or benefits of this project?	
Iteration Length		Name and location of collaboration tool(s)	
Approval Date	[Date]	Update(s) Date: Changes	[Date]

Example of a Project Charter template

Embedding the project in the project's motivation and vision gives the project a framework within which it can operate. This framework defines the design space of the project. It is, of course, limited by other requirements. However, the project should not go beyond the boundaries of the motivation and vision.

This is not a restriction. Rather, motivation and vision serve as the minimum orientation I need in a VUCA environment. Projects are earmarked - motivation and vision give the project meaning beyond that. If motivation and vision are neglected or play no role at all in projects, the projects quickly become an empty space without orientation.

Projects as orientation

Analogous to personal practice, projects with their activities and results serve as orientation in a VUCA world. If they are aligned with project motivation and vision, they bring life to motivation and vision. At the latest when a project is completed, I can determine whether and to what extent the project has brought me closer to my vision. Alternatively, I can do this already during the project. I can do this by periodically reviewing what I have already accomplished and what I plan to do next. If these reviews take place at regular intervals and partial results are delivered with each review date, which then already represent added value and bring us closer to the vision, this makes orientation and further project design immensely easier. We will take a closer look at this type of project design in Chapter 15: "Agile door openers".

The more VUCA-like the environment is, the more important the regular checkpoints become. If I notice that I am drifting away from the vision and goals, I can readjust in time and get back on track. The more dynamic the environment, the more likely it is that requirements will change during the course of the project. And the more important it becomes that I can react flexibly to this with my project and adapt my path. The prerequisite for this is that both the motivation and the vision remain stable.

The situation is different if the motivation and vision should change during the project. Motivation is the basis for the project. It is the *raison d'être* of the project. If it changes, the direction of the project also changes, which affects the project goals and design. It is the same when the vision and thus the basic goal orientation and direction of the project change. If there are deviations, triggered by whatever, the basic structure of the project changes. Thus,

while project goals and activities may change, project motivation and vision must remain stable over the life of the project.

How do you make your personal MVPs overlap with those of the project?

So, a project also has an MVP design structure. If you can identify with the MVP, there is an overlap with your personal MVP. You can illustrate this as follows:



The project and me

The larger the intersection, the more you can “merge” into a project. If, on the other hand, there is no intersection at all or only a small one, you can consider as an individual whether you want to work in this project (if you can decide this yourself) or how you can work towards there being a larger intersection. Whether it’s by moving toward the project by, for example, adjusting your activities and perhaps vision. Or by trying to influence the direction of the project and its design so that it becomes more compatible with you.

From a project or company perspective, things look somewhat different. The necessary condition for a successful project is the definition and alignment of project motivation, vision and practice. However, this alone is not sufficient. Since the project is implemented by employees, it makes sense that I also pick them up. For example, you select the employees who are motivated to participate in the project. Or you design the project in such a way that you reach these employees. Bringing employees along or reaching out to them is therefore a sufficient condition for a successful project.

However, it’s not individual employees alone that you want to bring along, but it’s the cooperation and interaction of the individual project employees in a team that is another sufficient condition. And there is also an MVP structure for a team, which we will now look at.

MVP for the Team

Team - Motivation

The question of why, and thus the motivation for collaboration, arises from answering the following two questions:

- What is the purpose of the collaboration? - This question is directly related to the MVP of the project.
- What is needed? For example, what skills and abilities should team members bring to the table and what should the team as a whole cover?

Again, we can ask who is affected by the collaboration - positively and negatively - and finally, what happens if there is no collaboration?

Team - Vision

The vision of cooperation can be the antithesis of a lack of cooperation, if there is such a lack. The vision is thus the ideal cooperation of individual employees. We can compare this with the interaction of human cells.¹³⁰ Each cell in the body is programmed to cooperate with other cells to ensure that the organ of which they are a part remains healthy and can function. In return, the cells get the energy they need to survive from the organ - a perfect symbiosis.

If a cell steps out of line and wants to pursue its own goals, which is the case with cancer cells, this can be fatal for other cells and ultimately for the entire organ.

In an ideal collaboration, the individual team members each work on their own and yet in interaction with the other team members to achieve a common goal and a common vision. This has a positive impact on other bodies, e.g., other projects or departments, and ultimately on the whole organism of the company or organization.

The vision question explores this picture and describes the ideal state in interaction with motivation. The vision shows what impact this has on the team itself, the project, other related or dependent projects or activities elsewhere in the organization, and ultimately on the entire company or organization.

Team - Practice

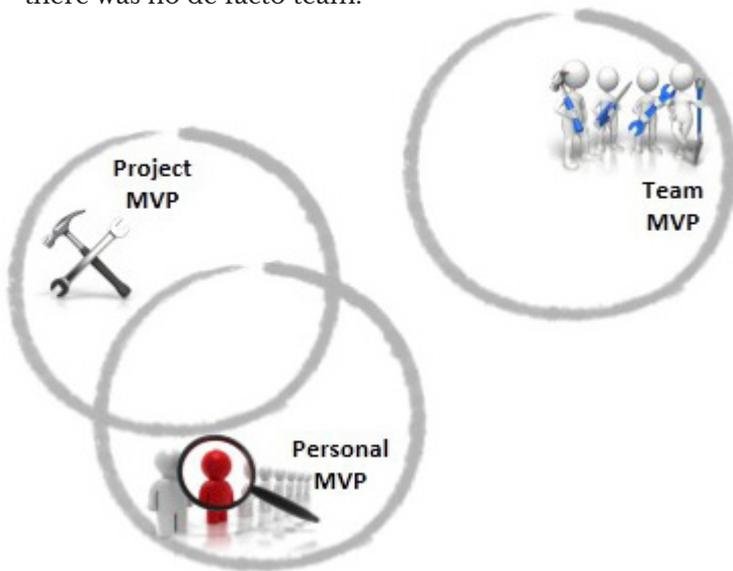
For practitioners, there are a variety of questions and issues that are relevant before the start of the project and during the life of the project.¹³¹

- Roles and responsibilities in the team must be defined and agreed on the basis of the motivation and vision. It must also be clarified what the team members expect from each other and how one wants to react or act in case of necessary changes in roles and responsibilities.
- The environment and the way people work together have a big impact on a team's performance. The sooner the team figures out what factors contribute to a high-performance environment and can be realized, the better for the performance of the entire team.
- While motivation and vision are stable, this does not necessarily apply to the practice in the collaboration nor to the project. The question here is how the team wants to react to changes in the project or in the team and realign itself. Conversely, the team wants to determine early on how it will ensure continuous learning and development.
- Last but not least, it must be clarified how, when and who delivers which project results. Because, as nice as rules of collaboration may be, at the end of the day, the team must deliver results. It must also be able to orient itself. That is, it must know what it has already delivered, what it will tackle next, what challenges and risks it is struggling with, and how it will deal with them.

Synergy effects

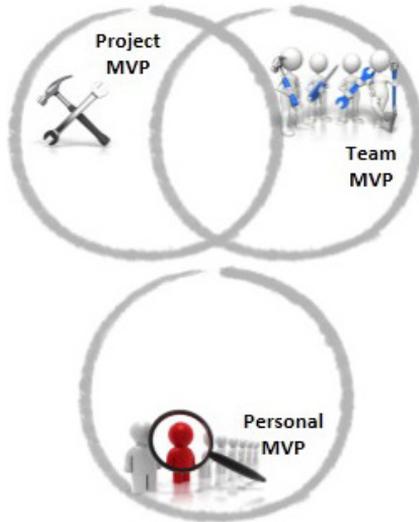
Ideally, there is as large an intersection as possible of all three MVPs: the personal, the project and the team MVPs. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that there will actually be an intersection.

In the past, I have seen projects where there was MVP overlap of projects and individual contributors while there was no de facto team.



A project without a real team

In other projects, there were intersections of project and team MVPs, while the MVPs of individual team members were not considered. In such cases, the survival of the team and often the entire project is seriously threatened. If the needs and MVPs of individuals are not taken into account, this can lead to the collapse of the team and the project, analogous to the development of cancer cells.



Project without overlapping MVPs of individual team members

It is better to work from the beginning to ensure that there are large intersections between the MVPs of the project, individuals, and the team.

If this intersection exists, this is the opportunity for a so-called wow-project. A wow project is a very special project. Tom Peters defines wow projects as projects that add value, are important, make a difference, and leave a legacy.¹³²



Overlap of project MVP, personal MVP, and team MVP.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee for such a wow project. Nor is it certain that if you are at a wow moment, it will last for the entire duration of the project.

I can create the structures for the development of wow projects. The questions in this chapter serve as initial aids. Nevertheless, one must not be under any illusions and believe that wow projects cannot also become victims of change. That is why there is no alternative but to pay constant attention to the dynamics in the team and in the project and to shape the dynamics as well as possible on one's own by reacting openly to changes, adapting and re-aligning oneself and thus striving to continually improve oneself.¹³³



Where can the MVP model be applied?

As an approach, the MVP approach can be applied and extended to any kind of work, although it is particularly suited to projects. When I developed it a few years ago, I wanted to put it through a special stress test and see if it was possible to set up concrete projects on the basis of simple ideas in the shortest possible time in such a way that wow projects would emerge from them. I will describe this experiment in the next chapter.

Further exercises

- Create your own MVPs either for a specific period of time, your whole life or for a specific project.
- Review whether an existing or past project had a clear direction in terms of motivation and vision. What influence did this have on the design and results of the project?

12. The HIP Camp: More Than A Conference

“Whether you think you can do something or you can’t, you’re right.”

Henry Ford

Key points

- Sharing ideas and experiences without action is not sustainable.
- A holistic learning environment considers activities for the mind, heart and body.
- Wow moments are quickly fleeting if not cherished.

In search of generative learning in a conference

In October 2012, I attended the *PMI Global Congress North America* as a guest speaker.¹³⁴ It was the first time since 1999 that I visited the wonderful city of Vancouver. The combination of the ocean and mountains, the international flair with people from all over the world and the great architecture makes this city a very special place.

The conference center itself also has features that many conference centers don't. The architecture is phenomenal. Right at the entrance, a giant globe floats above the escalators. The windows let in a lot of light and allow a terrific view of the city, the harbor, the bay and the mountains.

And it was this special view and atmosphere that I remembered best. During the breaks between the lectures, I was drawn out of the conference building to enjoy the view outside. I was not alone. In fact, I felt that a large percentage of the attendees were drawn outside during the breaks to enjoy, breathe in, and just marvel at the unique atmosphere of the city and nature. Once the break was over, we found it difficult to return to the building and the windowless conference halls. So, the anticipation remained for the next break and the next chance to enjoy the spectacle of nature and the city.

The interplay of having a conference in a building and enjoying nature during breaks got me thinking. I asked myself why one could not do a conference in nature. Why not integrate the special atmosphere and energy of nature into a conference. It would then no longer be necessary to swarm out during the breaks. When I am in nature, I calm down. My senses are more alert, I can "take in" more, I am more present - ideal conditions, therefore, for the exchange of ideas and experiences, to get new impulses for thought and to be inspired.

I researched and found a number of conferences and workshops that have been offering this for years. These include Mindvalley's A-Fest¹³⁵, the Summit Series¹³⁶, the Happy Startup School Summer Camp¹³⁷ as well as the Happy Startup School Alptitude¹³⁸ or SoulWorx's Exponentially Human Seminar Retreat.¹³⁹

These examples and my own experiences in Vancouver motivated me to see for myself if and how this could be achieved. For me it was about the personal experience on one hand and on the other hand to learn whether and to what extent the choice of environment can promote the exchange of ideas and experiences and whether an open environment can be found or created that promotes holistic learning with mind, body and heart.

In addition, I wanted to find out how to get more out of conferences or lectures. At most conferences, it's the case that lectures and people appeal to you a lot and even inspire you. Unfortunately, this euphoria doesn't last long. At the latest, when you get back to "everyday life" at home, the memory of the great lectures and ideas fades. Sometimes faster, sometimes slower. The original inspiration and intention turn into memories whose energy diminishes faster and faster until it disappears altogether. A real investment and real learning look different.

Why go to conferences if most of what is new is forgotten after a short time? Why attend conferences if they don't enable sustainable learning? And why go to conferences if, apart from new ideas that don't survive for too long afterwards anyway, I don't take much more home with me?

So, I wondered how a conference would need to be designed to enable sustainable learning to ensure a real "return on investment." I believed that the MVP model we learned about in the previous chapter would work very well. In the years that followed, I tried it out.

First attempts: Davos 2014

The first opportunity came at a seminar for former fellows of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation during the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2014. I presented the MVP model and invited the participants to test it afterwards. However, not in a room but in the ski resort. i.e., on the mountain. There we met a few days later in the morning for the second part of the workshop. For each lift ride, I gave the participants a different question to answer. First, it was about what was currently moving them. This was followed by questions about the nature of their challenges, their visions, and finally, what specifically could be done next. The exchange of ideas and answers to the questions and thought-provoking ideas took place on the lifts. So, we usually had between 10 and 30 minutes to discuss each question. In between, we skied, enjoyed the snow and the fresh air.

The time flew by. When we then stopped for lunch, we were all very surprised at how far we had come with our questions and answers. In the morning, we had started with a problem description. By lunchtime, we not only had a better understanding of the challenge, but we had also developed a joint vision and derived concrete measures.

We were amazed in that we had not expected to be able to develop such ideas and concrete measures while skiing. At the same time, we still had enormous fun. We were delighted to see what creative forces were released when we combined activities for mind, body and heart.

“Social Entrepreneurship: Let Happiness Happen”

Later in 2014, I organized a conference with friends into which we incorporated the MVP concept. The theme of the conference was social entrepreneurship on the one hand and happiness research and its impulses for modern entrepreneurship on the other. So, we called the conference *Social Entrepreneurship: Let Happiness Happen*.¹⁴⁰

The conference was divided into three parts. We started with a series of keynote presentations on social entrepreneurship¹⁴¹ and happiness research in business. This was followed by a visit to a business accelerator for social startups and initiatives and conversations with founders. In the third part, we invited the conferees to turn their own ideas into concrete initiatives using the MVP concept, which they planned to continue working on after the conference.

The results spoke for themselves. Not only were we able to learn a lot about social entrepreneurship and happiness research, but we also experienced how social start-ups are created and were then able to translate our ideas into concrete projects ourselves.

The conference showed me that the combination of impulse lectures, exchange of experiences and dialogue as well as the translation of the new impulses into own, personal projects is much more sustainable than conventional conferences.

In contrast to the workshop in Davos, the experiences in nature were still missing here. Also, neither in Davos nor in Berlin was there enough space to exchange ideas about the MVPs on a personal and team level. This moved me to go one step further.

HIP Camp 2015

The beginning

In spring 2015, I shared my previous experiences with the MVP concept at a start-up event in Heidelberg, Germany. I described my vision of a conference that built on previous experiences and included sufficient time and space for the development and exchange of personal and team MVPs. In addition, the experience of nature was to be integrated into the conference.

Fortunately, following the event, I was approached by a number of students who were interested in collaborating on the vision. In the weeks that followed, we designed and organized a two-day conference. The HIP Camp¹⁴², as we called the conference, was to be a combination of keynote presentations, seminars and workshops, and outdoor and other activities to bring mind, body and heart into alignment for a holistic learning experience. “HIP” stood for “happy ideas and projects”. We chose social entrepreneurship as a sub-theme. The idea was to share social challenges or ideas and translate them into concrete projects or even start-ups during the HIP Camp.

Four months later, in September 2015, we welcomed 30 participants from all over Germany to the Friends-of-Nature house in the woods above Heidelberg. The field of participants was a colorful mix. There were students as well as professionals - the age spectrum ranged from 18 to 65 years.

Approach

We started with a series of short keynote presentations about examples of social entrepreneurship and stories about social challenges. Following this, we opened the space for a collection of ideas and questions that participants wanted to address afterwards. In our approach, we combined the methodology of Open Space with the question structure of the MVP concept. The characteristic of Open Space is that the participants bring their own topics to the group and form working groups. This open-

ness makes it possible to produce a wide variety of ideas, questions and concrete measures in a very short time.¹⁴³ Participants either presented their own ideas or invited others to engage with them or joined the group with the ideas and issues of their interest. The teams formed and organized themselves on their own - without any input from the organizing team. The drivers for this were the interest in the topics and the self-motivation of the participants.

To ensure the greatest possible transparency about the work in the groups, we invited all groups to a joint plenary session at regular intervals, in which the individual groups could briefly report on their work and inspire other comrades-in-arms to do the same. After a few hours, most groups had a rough idea of their motivation, vision and possible concrete activities.

The second part of the conference was reserved for giving participants space to reflect on their own MVPs. As an impulse, we started with a dialogue exercise. Afterwards, participants could retreat, share with a coach, practice yoga, or join a silent experiential walk in the forest. Later, we invited participants to share in their groups about their personal MVPs in interaction with the MVPs of the activities they had previously developed in the groups.

The second day focused on the development of the groups' MVPs and the concretization of the activities from the previous day. We offered support for the structuring and concretization of the activities, be it for the development of business models¹⁴⁴ or the setting up of projects¹⁴⁵.

As on the previous day, the groups reported on their progress to the plenum every 90 minutes or so. In this way, they were able to receive valuable feedback, and find friends and new comrades-in-arms who wanted to participate in the realization of the project. That is, even at this late stage, participants had the opportunity to change groups or simply watch and observe the goings-on, according to the rules of Open Space.

The second day was rounded off by a final pitch round of the individual groups and an award ceremony for the individual project proposals by the plenum and a jury of experts. The results were impressive: we developed a total of four concrete projects, one of which became a real start-up in the following months.

Results

The HIP Camp was a great success in many respects. At the beginning, none of us had expected that we would initiate so many projects and even a start-up within two days. That alone was a huge success. The HIP Camp also allowed us to validate the practicality and effectiveness of the MVP concept. The MVP concept offered a simple structure for bundling the many ideas and questions that arose after the impulse presentations or that the participants already brought with them and translating them into concrete measures. The structure did not restrict creativity. Rather, it gave the participants a certain degree of orientation and structure for a creative space in which they could move freely without drifting off into other topics.

Core of success

In terms of content and method, the HIP Camp was a great success, which made us all enthusiastic and very proud. But the very special thing about and in the HIP Camp was something else: it was the atmosphere in the whole group.

All participants were interested in the topic of “social entrepreneurship”, wanted to learn and try things out, and simply have fun. And yet, at the beginning of the event, there was still a certain amount of distance between the participants. It was all rather businesslike. People discussed and exchanged ideas, developed concrete measures for the questions raised and ideas presented. That alone was a great experience. And yet everything remained rather superficial and top-heavy.

This changed in the second part of the workshop with the impulse lecture and exercise by a psychologist about active, empathic and generative listening¹⁴⁶ and the activities offered afterwards (conversation with a coach, yoga, experiential walk, time of silence). These activities opened spaces that each and every participant could enter and create for themselves. Organizationally, this was certainly also the most exciting part of the HIP Camp, because we could not foresee if and how this would be accepted by the participants. Our intention was to offer the space for personal reflection. Maybe it was just a coincidence that the participants accepted this offer, maybe not.

It was interesting to observe that not everyone was convinced of the offer from the beginning. Some went along because it was offered, but then found their personal space.

We were even less able to foresee whether and to what extent the individual participants would share their personal drivers, visions and goals in the context of the projects or activities previously outlined. The fact that they actually did so was great and created an atmosphere of openness and honesty. In this very personal exchange in the groups, some participants realized that they did not or would not feel comfortable with their own motivation, vision and goals in the group. They then either switched to another group or started their own group. This was not detrimental to the cohesion of all participants. The opposite was the case, because everyone gave the others room for personal development and respected them. This created understanding and respect for the individual as well as for the group.

The exchange in the respective groups brought a certain lightness and serenity to the overall group. It was as if new spaces of creativity were opened up and entered. This continued on the second day when the activities previously developed were put into concrete terms. The energy of the day before was taken into the work. The structured questions for developing team collaboration, business modeling, or project building helped channel the energy toward concrete results. Compared to the strong and positive energy in the teams and community, the results were almost secondary.

What was missing?

Immediately following the HIP Camp, we all thought that the energy in the individual groups and the overall group would live on and help drive the projects forward. Unfortunately, as we learned over time, this was not the case. As committed as we on the organizing team were to the preparation and execution of the HIP Camp, required follow-up activities were not on our radar. For an award-winning project, the prize was methodological support for further project design. And indeed, this project later developed into a successful start-up. Unfortunately, the other groups and projects did not receive this support.

And the group as a whole also lost track of each other relatively quickly. There were a number of circulars and press releases. But the momentum of the two days was quickly lost. That was a pity. At the same time, this development showed us the dynamics of projects: Even if you have set up a wow project and are working on it, that doesn't mean that the project will be a self-runner from this point on forward and that the wow moment will live on forever.¹⁴⁷

Why are wow moments not sustainable?

Wow moments alone are not survivable. They need to be nourished, supported and lived. They want to be nurtured and cared for. They can grow bigger or smaller. But they can also dissolve altogether. This is all the more reason to care about developing and continuously improving wow moments. Not out of fear that they will fizzle out and disappear, but out of joy in creating them. This requires observation and reflection as well as action.

However, if the action is purely head-driven, it might be difficult to maintain a balance of all three MVPs. For an activity such as a project, this may be sufficient. But not for developing, bringing together, and keeping together the individual and team MVPs. This requires a skill that cannot be learned. It is a skill that we all have within us. It is the ability to be human. It enables us to open and create a human space in the everyday and in our work. It is a space in which we can unfold our human potential. We take a closer look at this space in the next chapter. We will learn what constitutes it, how we can shape it and fill it with life. And we will see how it can help us to actively shape the future instead of just becoming a pawn in it.

13. Human Design Spaces

“You will never discover new land if you always keep your eye on the shore.”

Unknown

Key points

- Human space is a place of inner peace and silence, where I feel safe and secure.
- I cannot force a human space. I can open it and explore it. This requires being actively in the here-and-now as well as “actively” letting go and relaxing. Letting go opens up a seemingly infinite space of ideas, inspirations and innovations that were not accessible or seen before.
- Human space is a space for potential development and creativity on the individual level, as a couple or in a group.
- Human space opens a gateway to individual or, if I am in a group, shared creativity in an atmosphere of trust, openness and willingness to learn.
- Opening up a human space as a pair or in a group yields a much greater variety of learning and creative spaces than staying at the individual level. It is a co-creative environment where experimenting and creating together allows for a much deeper and more lasting understanding of something new. It is the foundation of synergy.
- Prototyping makes it possible to explore, grasp and shape the future by doing. In essence, prototyping is a form of generative learning. It encourages and requires an open, light, playful and experimental approach to something new.

What is human space?

In the last chapter I hinted at what constitutes a human space. In this chapter, I'd like to invite you on an exploration of that space. We'll look at what makes a human space so special. And most importantly, how we can open it up. Be it for ourselves alone, with fellow human beings or couples, or in groups and teams.

Let's start: How can we describe a human space?

Well, it is a place of inner peace and silence, where I feel safe and secure. The space is not bound to an external place, it is within me or - if we share and create a human space with other people - between and among us. This space is energetic and yet quite calm. Once we are in this space, time seems to stand still. Hectic and driven feelings stay outside, and the space fills one with inner serenity and clarity about the here-and-now. I can breathe, think and feel freely. I don't feel constricted, but unbound and boundless.

Flow experience in human space

Top athletes sometimes refer to this space as the flow stage. They move in a “zone of unique energy”. In chapter 8 I explained that not only athletes can have such a flow experience. And this experience, as we will see later, is not limited to the individual level.

The flow state is a kind of moment when nothing is happening and yet everything is there. It is a moment of one hundred percent focus on a state or activity. If I am looking for ideas, insights, answers or solutions, this is a space where they can appear out of nowhere, make themselves known or come to mind. It is a space where a spark can ignite a fire of creativity and inspiration in me (and a partner) or in a group.

In the HIP Camp we could experience such a human space in the group. It opened up during an exercise in which we tried generative listening with our counterpart. We listened actively to our counterpart for two minutes without reacting to him with gestures, facial expressions or even questions or comments. We listened actively, were present, and actively perceived every word, every syllable, and the whole person sitting across from us. After two minutes, we switched roles. For many of the participants, this was a unique experience. Of course, we had actively listened to people before. What was special about the exercise was the instruction not to react immediately to what was being communicated, but to simply perceive it and give the person speaking a space in which he or she could express themselves.

Immediately after this exercise, we invited the participants to yoga, music or a silent walk in the forest. The goal was to give them the chance to arrive at or within themselves. We wanted to offer a kind of platform: each individual could become clearer about their personal motivations, visions and goals here. The activities, the environment, we participants ourselves created a mood of inner peace, serenity and joy, which had an effect on the whole group. From this, fresh energy developed in the group during the evening and also the next morning. New ideas, inspirations and answers to questions just bubbled out of us. It was sometimes as if someone had opened a door to creativity.

The structure of the HIP Camp contributed to the fact that ideas, insights and answers to questions were transformed into concrete results or held for later realization. The energy of the human space was thus kept alive and could expand.

How can I open up human space?

I cannot force a human space. I can open it and explore it. It requires an “active” letting go and relaxing in order to create something - which in itself seems to be a contradiction. But then it is not quite like that.

Tools for opening human space are, for example, active and open observation or reframing questions, i.e., reformulating questions to allow other perspectives. It is also the art and potentials of dialogue at the individual, interpersonal and group levels that open up human spaces.

Admittedly, the description of a human room sounds a bit unusual. Yet it is anything but. It appears or feels more like a completely normal space or state - unfortunately, it can't really be put into words. The best and easiest thing to do is to search for this space yourself or to open it up in order to be able to experience and understand it. Let's start with ourselves and see how we as individuals can open and keep open our own human space.

Human space for me as an individual

To better understand the idea of human space, it may help to imagine the opposite of a human space: This would be, for example, a situation characterized as hectic and stressful. I'm racing from one appointment to another, everyone seems to want something from me, I'm trying to think of or juggle several things at once and just can't seem to get any rest. When I get home in the evening, I am limp, drained, lacking energy and unmotivated. On the one hand, I am aware that I am in a kind of hamster wheel and want to break out of it. On the other hand, I don't have a clue how to do that, or I would need time to do it - and there isn't any, because, for example, I need enough sleep to be fit again the next day. So, the hamster wheel keeps turning, getting faster and faster.

Slow down the hamster wheel and bring it to a halt

Let's look at two simple options to bring the hamster wheel to a halt, at least for a short time:

Option 1: In all the stress of everyday life, I sit down and treat myself to a coffee or some other indulgence. I enjoy the coffee, as much as I can, to the fullest, smelling the aroma, tasting the hot coffee, taking a breath for a few moments, trying to relax. No question, this can help to relax and slow down the hamster wheel a bit. The hamster wheel doesn't really stop. At the latest when we get up again and go to the next appointment, the thoughts take over again. Not much remains of a human space.

Option 2: Here, too, we want to come to rest. I sit down on a chair, stool or on the floor. It's best to sit so that my spine is straight, and my shoulders can be relaxed.

The first exercise is to arrive first. I become aware of where and how I am sitting. I notice that many thoughts are rushing through my head and trying to capture my attention. At the same time, I look at the environment in which I am currently sitting.

In the next step, I try to consciously perceive my seat. How straight am I sitting? Where do I feel tension in my body? Where does something possibly hurt me? This is a kind of first arrival in my body.

Next, I listen to my breath. I listen and feel how I breathe in and out. Whether it's my chest moving up and down, or my abdominal wall, or a combination of both. In doing so, I try not to control the breath, but merely observe and notice it. If I like, I close my eyes while doing this. It's not really necessary, but it helps me to track my breath more easily.

The next step is to focus on my heart, feeling or perhaps even hearing it beat, and over time, as I become calmer, how it beats a little slower. From here, I begin a "body scan". That is, I feel into my whole body, feeling into every part of my body. For this I can go from the heart towards the feet or head, or I start at my feet and slowly move upwards in my mind to my head, or vice versa. The direction is less important than feeling into my body. The goal is to feel and perceive the whole body consciously.

The fact that I become calmer inside is a good and intentional side effect. However, I do not actively control it, but allow it to happen.

This also helps me in trying to let go of my thoughts. Easier said than done. At least that's how I often feel - especially on hectic days. To let go of my thoughts, I observe how they come and go. In doing so, I don't give in to the temptation to cling to them. Every now and then I try to anticipate the next thought - that's a nice change. Or I try to identify and perceive the space between thoughts. If I find that difficult, I focus on my breath again. Breathing in and out, then letting my thoughts run free again without getting attached to them.

If I come to silence in this way, I can try to let the spaces or the "nothingness" between the thoughts become larger and let myself fall into them. At first this may be only fractions of a second, but later this can become longer. These are moments when I am completely in the here-and-now, without being distracted by the activities of the mind, that is, by my thoughts.

This moment of being here and now is one's own human space. Time ceases to exist as well as all mental limitations, worries or fears. It is rather that experiencing this here and now opens new and unlimited spaces.

Use of human space

Just experiencing my own human space is a pleasure and fills me with well-being. It fills me with inner peace, serenity and energy. If I want to use this energy to open gates to inner creativity, I can do two things.

Option A: Before I find inner peace within myself, as in option 2 described above, I ask myself a question that moves me and to which I seek answers. As soon as I have asked it, I try to let go and feel inside myself. Sometimes an answer or a hint for a solution that fits my question comes to me out of nowhere. Sounds strange? Well, it is not really.

In the spring of 2018, I commuted to my client for about 45 minutes by train on weekdays. I didn't feel like reading or doing any mental activities yet. Sleeping was out of the question for me. For one thing, I wanted to arrive at the client's site awake, and for another, I wasn't really tired enough to want to go right back to sleep three quarters of an hour after getting up. I saw the possibility of finding my inner peace by meditating as a welcome alternative. Every morning I asked myself different questions. Sometimes they were questions about my current projects. This then led me to boost my mind with this kind of meditation and my head took the reins early in the morning. I didn't really find inner peace that way. So, I asked myself more and more questions about myself. For example, how to find my inner peace, how to be more authentic, how to find lost energy again, and so on. I wrote down the answers I got in my meditations while still on the train. When I re-read my notes later, I was not infrequently amazed at the depth of the insights, which, after all, did not come from the outside, but from within myself. Less from my head than from or out of my heart. Most of these questions and answers are in Chapter 8. They are landmarks on my journey to myself.

Option B: Another way to tap into the potential of inner peace is even easier and more convenient. Like the first option, it involves seeking answers to questions that move me. Instead of seeking answers in meditation, I get them in my sleep. For this, immediately before going to bed, I write my questions on a pad or piece of paper next to my bed. Before I turn out the light and get comfortable, I give thanks inwardly in advance that I will get answers to these questions by the next morning. Then when I wake

up in the morning, the first thing I do is take the paper or pad with the questions, read through the questions again, and then start writing what comes to mind about the questions. It is not so much my head that “dictates” the words so early in the morning. So early my mind is not yet in a position to be active. It feels more like the answers or impulses come from my heart or my being itself.

The state in the morning shortly after waking up is a wonderful human space. I am awake (more or less), aware (more or less), still somewhat attached to sleep and thus to my deeper consciousness. Right now, I activate my creativity in writing. Limiting thoughts do not come up at all. It is usually too early for that. I just let my words flow, write down everything that comes to mind, and then see what comes up.

I admit that this may sound no less strange than getting answers in meditation during the day. It may be strange too, but it works. And it is a wonderful example of what I can achieve when I am in my own human space - indeed, a gateway to my own inner creativity.

Human space in interpersonal relationship

In interpersonal relationships, such as a couple, dialogue can help open up human spaces. In this context, a dialogue is much more than just listening. Scharmer (2009) speaks of four different levels of listening.¹⁴⁸

On the first level, I hear my counterpart speak. I perceive him or her. Now and then I also process what is said, but I do not give it any further meaning. Essentially, it is a matter of confirming one's own opinions and evaluations. This listening is superficial at best. Whether it contributes to an open interpersonal relationship may at least be doubted. Rather, such a relationship moves in a narrow space of the past and entrenched opinions, evaluations and habits. One exchanges empty phrases out of politeness or routine. Honesty or authenticity are irrelevant. It is an environment toxic to exploration, innovation, and new solutions. Scharmer refers to this level as “**downloading.**”

On the second level of listening, I process what I have heard. For example, I may notice that my counterpart has the same or a different opinion than I do on a topic. The interlocutors are quite open because they notice differences without really responding to them. This kind of listening is what Scharmer calls “**factual listening.**”

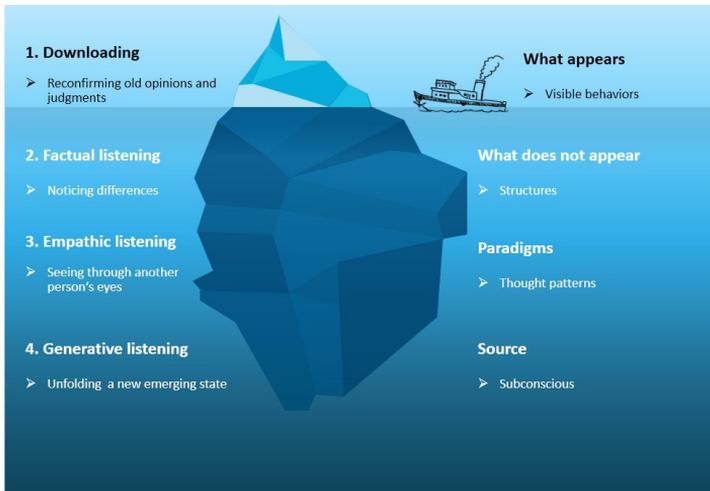
If I actively try to understand why my counterpart speaks or thinks in this way and not in a different way, and to look at his or her opinion from his or her perspective, we speak of “**empathic listening.**” I open both my mind and my heart. I try to put myself in the other person's shoes to better understand them. I see the world from the other person's point of view. This helps me to reflect on my own point of view.

An even deeper level of listening is “**generative listening.**” Not only do I listen to my counterpart factually and empathically, I allow them space to unfold. I can achieve this, for example, by not reacting immediately to what is said, but by letting what is said stand for the time being. In this way, I give what has been said the chance to resonate or the other person the chance to continue talking.

Active silence is an essential feature of generative listening. “Active” because it is not simply silence. Rather, silence allows what is said to take effect - it gives the other person the chance to continue or to let new ideas, impulses or thoughts come, which only reveal themselves in the silence. This kind of listening thus generates something new - which is why it is also called “generative listening”.

The prerequisite for generative listening is that I open not only my mind and heart, but also my will. An open will is characterized by the fact that in a dialogue I do not actively try to defend my own point of view and convince someone of it. Instead, I enter into dialogue with an open mind and am willing to let my own opinion simply be an opinion. I open myself to hear, to experience, to learn new things. Be it from the other person or as a result or in the dynamics of the conversation. This kind of generative listening opens up a human space in which new things can emerge.¹⁴⁹

As an image for the levels of listening, Scharmer uses an iceberg, following Edgar Schein (1985)¹⁵⁰. Superficial listening floats at the very top, above the water level. The deeper we go, the deeper and more active we listen, the better we understand our counterpart, can comprehend them better.



Listening levels

The human space of silence is opened with generative listening - this is where the creativity spark is created. Human space picks up both interlocutors, both the speaker and the listener, and gives communication time and space to work and thus unfold.

Human space in a group

Let us now look at how a human space can be opened in a group, that is, in a gathering of at least three people, or how one can help it to develop.

The “framework conditions” or factors already described above that contribute to the opening of a human space for me alone or in an interpersonal relationship also apply in the group. However, I would like to make a qualification: I don’t want to speak of a random group, but of a group that has come together to make a difference. This can be the exchange about a problem, a question or an idea - or several - or also about one or several projects. Whether this is a specific project is less important than the intention for coming together. This may or may not have a specific goal. In extreme cases, pure curiosity or interest in a topic can be enough.

Common intention

A good example of such a coming together is the open space approach from the last chapter: a group of people gets together to talk about an overarching topic and to make something out of it. What is actually dealt with is decided by the group or by individuals in the group, who either pose a particular question, idea or project to be worked on or invite others in the group to participate. The fact that individual group members join a question, an idea or a project presented by a group member shows at least a common interest in the topic. Whether this interest develops into something more, e.g., a common motivation, becomes apparent over time. The decisive factor here is that the small group works together on an intention or that it develops. The intention can be limited to questions, problems or ideas, or it can distinguish between motivation and vision, as we presented in chapter 11.

In a project landscape or when it comes to launching a concrete initiative on a topic, in my experience it is very important to be aware of what drives you. This applies both to knowing where you are coming from (motivation) and where you would like to go (vision). Both form the basis for a successful initiative - be it a simple undertaking, a

project or even something more such as founding a company or a new corporate direction. Very important: it is less about implementing something known than about exploring new territory and developing something new. After the group has developed a common understanding of the intention, the next step is to approach the problem, question or idea together - not with preconceived opinions or thinking templates, but with an open mind. It is not about evaluating or classifying, but first simply observing and grasping the problem, question or idea. This can be done in a group. Or you go to where the problems, questions or ideas have arisen - for example in the form of a site visit. You talk to those affected and thus learn more about the open questions at first hand.

In corporate projects, for example, I invite the group to talk directly with their customers to get a better understanding of their needs. It's not enough to just know or anticipate what needs customers have or might have. It is much more effective, and sometimes even easier, to sit down and talk directly with customers. In doing so, I encourage the group to listen to customers on an empathic and generative level. After all, it's not about the explorers' opinions, it's about the interlocutors' side of the story.

After this dialogue, the group meets to discuss, reflect, sort and prioritize the impressions and findings. At this point at the latest, the intention that the group has formed together becomes more concrete. More concrete in that practical measures and also goals can be derived. It is no longer just about motivation and vision, but about practice, about the concrete steps towards the vision.

The more the group is involved in this process, the more likely it is that it will not only understand and support the specific measures, but that it will even identify with them. The more similar or overlapping the motivation, visions and goals are at the project, group and individual levels, the greater the sense of belonging. And the greater the human space in the group.

Natural self-organization

In such an exchange, one can quickly find out whether and to what extent something like an MVP of cooperation also arises in the group as a whole or not. The question is how the individuals in the group can complement each other, who brings which skills and abilities and how they can be contributed. This results in roles, responsibilities and rules of collaboration. The extent to which this process of defining or developing roles and responsibilities is managed certainly depends on the project. However, it is not the case that it must always be controlled or dictated. If there is overlap among the MVPs of projects, individuals, and the group, the group is usually likely to organize itself. The overlap of MVPs, the common denominator, is a sufficient driver and regulator for this.

Ideally, the individuals in the group complement each other like cells in an organ, working autonomously or together and supporting and helping each other. The structure is not rigid and mechanical, but dynamic, adaptive and flexible. It adapts to the given situations. Orientation to the intention of the project serves as a stabilizing force.

Working in open dialog

The human space described above for the individual level and for the couple level can thus be found for a group in the overlap of the MVPs of the three levels (individual, couple, group). It is the same space, the spark for so-called wow intentions.

The work in this space is characterized by a dialogue within the group as well as with the “outside world”. This starts with coming together in the group at the beginning and runs like a thread through the entire collaboration. In dialogue, the focus is not on confirming one’s own opinion, evaluation, proven structures or processes. Rather, it is an opening process of observing, rethinking, and engaging with and learning something new. This is already very similar to generative learning as we experience it in children (see Chapter 7). The art of dialogue in the group is not always to react immediately to external stimuli, but to give oneself space and time to perceive and grasp the whole. Not only does this give you a much deeper understanding of a situation, but it also opens up spaces for the unfolding of new approaches, answers and ideas that were not perceivable before.

What happens in human space?

Human space is anything but chaos. It is a space for potential development and creativity. And this applies to all levels: i.e., at the individual level, in a couple or in a group. Human space makes it possible not to remain trapped in old patterns of behavior that make it difficult or impossible to find or develop answers to questions, solutions to problems, or implementation approaches to ideas. Human space is more like a release from old shackles that may have been or even are the cause of questions and problems. Letting go opens up a seemingly infinite space of ideas, inspirations, and innovations that were previously unavailable or unseen to one. It is as if one's blinders are taken off and new perspectives open up.

What you can create in a human space

A human space allows you to be in the here-and-now. That is beautiful. And yet this experience can be limited if you either fall back into old patterns or do nothing with the space. The most beautiful and best ideas, inspirations, answers and approaches to solutions remain useless if you don't grab them, try them out and thus really learn from and with them.

It's a bit like art: it doesn't come about by providing tools, ideas and inspirations. Art only results when I do something with the ideas and inspirations and bring them to life. A painter who has a brush, paint and a canvas becomes creative only when he uses his tools and works with them.

And it's the same with human space, whether it's one's own, interpersonal, or in a group. Basically, it is a kind of art. Only: art cannot be meticulously planned. Art is created in spontaneous activity. It is a first brush stroke, followed by a second, a third and so on. How and what arises, one recognizes perhaps only with time. But you have to start with a first step.

When we are not artists, it is a matter of using the spontaneous spark of ideas in human space and expressing it, be it through words or deeds. It is a matter of implementing the idea, the answer or the approach to a solution immediately. If something cannot be implemented as a whole or we are not sure yet, we can try it out to see if and how it fits. Trying something out on a small scale without claiming perfection, but with the intention of learning is called "prototyping". Prototypes make it possible to explore, grasp and shape the future by doing.

Prototyping is essentially nothing other than generative learning. It is an expression of creativity and innovation – as an antithesis to fixed planning, which may work in a safe and familiar environment, but not in the VUCA world. Generative learning through prototyping not only helps us explore, experience and grasp new things, shedding light on a dark VUCA environment, but it also delivers concrete results.

Co-creation in the group

Opening up a human space for oneself and creatively shaping it is an energizing and fulfilling practice. However, it ultimately remains one's own perspective. If, on the other hand, I want to achieve change in a group and shape the future together, it is not enough to just open up my own individual human space. I need the help of others, especially when it comes to more complex challenges.

Opening a human space as a pair or in a group results in much greater diversity, more learning and a larger creative space. It is a co-creative environment where experimenting and designing together allows for a much deeper and more sustainable understanding of something new - that is the basis for synergy. Collaborative prototyping creates an innovative environment with tangible results. The future is not imagined, but experienced *peu à peu* with small steps and made more tangible.

Against the backdrop of these considerations, it should be the most natural thing in the world for companies and organizations to do everything they can to create such co-creative spaces and environments, in their own interest. Or at least whenever they want to embrace and master change in the digital world.

Only the reality is still different. We have seen that the basic prerequisite for a move toward change and design is to be aware that long-established patterns of behavior can no longer cope with newer challenges and that they no longer offer us any orientation. Without this realization, or even some pain that newer challenges cause, it is unlikely that anything will move in a company or organization. At least, not initiated by the leadership of a company or an organization.

Alternatively, a company may decide to break new ground initially at the project level. Projects have the charm that they are more manageable, are also limited in time, and can still deliver concrete results. In this respect, they offer themselves as a kind of playground.

If a company is not willing to do this either, you can still create your own human space and encourage others to join in through your own actions, slowly creating change from the bottom up.

Individual projects or change from below are no guarantee for sustainable rethinking and action, but they are a start. Ultimately, holistic change is needed. Unfortunately, there is no blueprint for this. It's a pill that traditional environments have to swallow.

Prototyping as a gateway to the future

The very approach and practice of prototyping is likely to be met with skepticism and perhaps even outright rejection and resistance in many traditional environments. To dare to do it anyway requires courage and leadership. It's important to remember that prototyping doesn't require turning an entire environment or system upside down right away. It's an incremental, cautious approach. The moment I try to squeeze prototyping into fixed tracks, structures and processes, you miss the essence of prototyping. You curtail the potential that unfolds with prototyping and thus generative learning.

Prototyping encourages and requires an open, light, playful and experimental approach. If I am afraid of making mistakes, I will not like this world and consequently reject it. But then it is also questionable whether I have already opened up my own human space, let alone that of a group.

My experience is that doubters and hesitators are most likely to be encouraged to open up with results. This is not about starting a palace revolution, but about gradual change and evolution, which hardly anyone is likely to be completely averse to. Even when there are already proven and time-honored best practices, there is always likely to be an interest in making best practices even better.

If this is not wanted, one still has the choice to go the way for oneself alone, to open up one's human space and to shape it. It is less about resistance against established structures than about the personal choice of how one wants to live and to shape that. Because even then - only on the individual level - the fruits of human space are abundant and immeasurable. We thus give ourselves a gift and do ourselves a great favor. This is not likely to go unnoticed. And that is a good thing. Because if we invite and encourage others to follow this path with our attitude, our actions and our results, we multiply the fruits. Individuals become joint creators. Not in theory, but in practice, in the here-and-now and for our future.¹⁵¹

Further exercises

- Experiment with the tools for opening a human space. These include reframing questions or dialogues at the interpersonal or group level.
- Human space for me as an individual: pause in a situation characterized by hectic activity and stress. Give yourself an active break - however brief. Enjoy a coffee or a short walk or follow your breath, feel your body and try to let go of your thoughts and just be in the moment.
- Human space for me as an individual: Before you retreat for a few minutes, ask yourself a question that moves you and to which you are looking for answers. Once you have asked it, try to let it go and feel inside yourself. Sometimes an answer or a clue to a solution that fits your question will come to you out of nowhere. Alternatively, write your question on a pad next to your bed just before you go to sleep. As soon as you wake up the next morning, take the pad and write down the answers or impulses that come to mind.
- Human Space in Interpersonal Relationships: practice generative listening. Engage in a dialogue with a partner or customer. You can find instructions for a dialogue with customers or stakeholders at <https://www.presencing.org/resource/tools/dialogue-interview-desc>.
- Human space in a group: invite your group to a dialogue with customers. Find out what really moves the customer(s) and what their needs are. Encourage the group to listen to the customer on an empathic and generative level. After the dialogue, share, reflect, sort, and prioritize your impressions and insights as a group.
- Derive concrete actions and, if possible, try your hand at prototyping. Remember that prototyping is not about perfection; it is about learning. It allows you to explore, comprehend, and create the future by doing.

14. The Golden Rule for The Digital Age

“Treat people the way you want to be treated by them.”
Luke 6:31

Key points

- The Golden Rule offers an important orientation as to how we can and want to shape companies, life and work. It can help us to create a symbiosis between people and business and thus lay the foundation for a Human Business.
- The Golden Rule is an unchanging ancient principle rooted in human history that unites us all. It is the only principle that is actually shared worldwide.
- In the modern version of the Golden Rule, our planet is included:
“Treat others and the planet the way you want to be treated.”
- The Golden Rule is a tool and catalyst for achieving our primal human need for respect and love, community and connections with others. Technologies can help with this.
- The Golden Rule has three prerequisites: It requires empathy, courage and drive.
- In addition to the question “How do we want to live?” we should ask, “How can we shape our future responsibly?” The Golden Rule serves as an orientation for answering these questions.
- In implementing the Golden Rule, we must start with or ourselves. We can do our best for ourselves, but we must also do our best for the community.
- Being human begins with us. But it remains incomplete if we do not share it with others. This is another reason why the Golden Rule calls for joint action and the shaping of our future. It is a moving away from the “egoistic I” to the “communal we”.
- Most people want others to treat them with integrity, respect, honesty, generosity and kindness.

- If we scale the Golden Rule from the interpersonal to the corporate level, it is a call for human and ethical entrepreneurship - with a corporate culture characterized by trust and respect. It is about a symbiosis of customers, employees and companies, who are all beneficiaries in interaction and mutual consideration in the form of respect and support. That is why the Golden Rule is a core value of Human Business.
- As old as the Golden Rule is, it is still relevant today. And it is just as valuable for us humans as a Golden Rule for shaping the digital age together. It helps shift the focus away from artificial machines and back to us humans and our environment.



What is the Golden Rule?

The Golden Rule that we should treat our neighbor as we would like to be treated is an ancient principle of human interaction. What is so special about the rule is that it is shared worldwide across all borders, cultures and religions.

A brief history of the Golden Rule¹⁵²

- 1800 BC Egypt, the Middle Egyptian literary work “Eloquent Peasant” contains a first version: Do to the doer to cause that he do.
- 563–483 B.C. Buddha, *Dhammapada*, *Northern Canon*, 5:18: Hurt not others with what pains yourself.
- 551–479 B.C. Confucius, *Analects* 15:23: Don't do to others what you don't want them do to you.
- 500 B.C. Taoism in China: Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain and your neighbor's loss as your loss.
- 400 B.C. *Hinduism*, *Mahabharata* bk. 13: *Anusasana Parva*, 113: In happiness and misery, in the agreeable and the disagreeable, one should judge effects as if they came to one's own self.
- 30 B.C.–10 A.D. Judaism, Rabbi Hillel in *Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud*, 56a. What is hateful to yourself, don't do to another. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary.
- 4 B.C. –65 A.D. Christianity, *Matthew* 7:12: Treat others as you want to be treated, for this sums up the Law and the prophets.
- 222–235, Roman Emperor Alexander Severus: Adopts the Golden Rule, displaying it on public buildings.
- 610 Muhammad, *Hadiths*, *Bukhari* 1:2:12, *Muslim* 1:72 f., and *An-Nawawi* 13: None of you is a true believer unless he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.
- 1200 Inca leader Manco Capac in Peru, *Wattles* 1996: Each one should do unto others as he would have others do unto him.

- 1651 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 15: When you have doubts about the rightness of your action toward another, suppose yourself in the other's place.
- 1763 Voltaire, du Roy: The single fundamental and immutable law for men is the following: "Treat others as you would be treated."
- 1871 Charles Darwin, *Descent Man*: argues human morality evolves from a limited tribal concern to a higher, universal concern that's summed up in the Golden Rule.
- 1897-1904 Samuel Jones: Mayor of Toledo, Ohio, USA runs the city on Golden Rule terms.
- 1900 Proverb of the Yoruba people, Nigeria: One who is going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.
- 1948 United Nations, United Nations Declaration of Human Rights: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights ... and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood.
- 1948 Los Angeles High School: A high-school teacher conducts an experiment getting students to live the Golden Rule without telling their parents. Many later vow to live this way forever.
- 1963 Aldous Huxley, writer and philosopher: It has become clear that the Golden Rule applies not only to the dealings of human individuals and societies with one another, but also to their dealings with other living creatures and the planet.
- 2009 *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, a book by 300 Islamic leaders and 460 organizations on the Islamic Golden Rule: None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.
- 2015 second encyclical *Laudato si* by Pope Francis on climate change: The Golden Rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves.

In the face of rapid change in the digital age, the question arises as to whether such an old rule is still relevant today and can serve as a guide for our interaction in general and the development of Human Business in particular. The answer to this legitimate question is simple: Yes. Because we will still be dealing with human interactions in the future. In this respect, the Golden Rule very much has a *raison d'être*. Particularly in the VUCA world, in which new challenges come our way every day, in which digitization sometimes makes people obsolete or pushes them to the margins, it can offer us an important orientation as to how we can and want to shape companies, life and work. And it can help us to create a symbiosis of people and business and thus lay the foundation for a Human Business. To understand this, it is worth taking a closer look at the Golden Rule. For this, I interviewed an expert in the field: Kim Polman.

Imaginal Cells of Humanity - Interview with Kim Polman, Founder of Reboot the Future

In 2016, Kim Polman and Stephen Vasconcellos-Sharpe invited twenty-five of the world's most respected leaders and thinkers to create potential roadmaps for businesses and governments based on an understanding of the potential power of the Golden Rule. The result was a groundbreaking book - *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation*¹⁵³: an exciting and thought-provoking anthology that explores how a compassionate approach to business, politics, and the environment can transform our planet.

In this book, the authors explored the question: What happens when we let the Golden Rule guide us to change our thinking and behavior?

Motivated and supported by the inspiration and leadership of authors including Al Gore, Paul Polman, Desmond Tutu, Muhammad Yunus and many more, *Reboot the Future*¹⁵⁴ was formed to take up their common cause.

The modern Golden Rule



Kim Polman is the founder of Reboot the Future

Thomas: What is the modern Golden Rule? How does it differ from the original Golden Rule?

Kim: Well, there is not one original Golden Rule. ... There are many different versions. There are positive versions of the Golden Rule. So, "Treat others the way you want to be treated." And there is also the negative version. "Don't do to others what would also harm you." The Yoruba tribe in Nigeria says, "if you pinch a small bird with a pointed stick, try it on yourself first to feel how it hurts."

In general, the Golden Rule emphasizes the importance of looking more at the other person, rather than focusing only on oneself. In the modern version of the Golden Rule, we have added the planet, which is all life. This was inspired a few years ago by Pope Francis' encyclical on climate change. He included the whole idea of the earth and redefined the word from Genesis, where it is about giving man dominion over the whole earth. He interpreted "dominion" as "serving."

I grew up in nature, and I always wondered why humanity had the right to dominate all of nature. And if you look at the history of mankind, I think that's exactly what we've been doing, and we need to do it in a more sensitive way today. Otherwise, nature itself will disappear. And then what are we left with? So, our modern version of the Golden Rule is that we should treat the other and the earth as we would like to be treated.

A principled orientation in today's VUCA world

Thomas: What is special about the Golden Rule that makes it a fundamental orientation in today's VUCA world?

Kim: Well, VUCA is about a world that is constantly changing. How do we navigate it? How do we deal with it?

People are under a high degree of stress right now. They have to adapt all the time. Because of technology, change is just racing ahead. Climate change is advancing just as fast, and the financial industry is focused on a few rich people, and the rest of us are falling behind. So, the question inevitably arises: how do we deal with all these things?

I love how Thomas Friedman addresses this in his book *Thank You for Being Late*⁵⁵. He talks about the volatility, uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity and all these forces coming together. His first answer to how we deal with it is the Golden Rule. He urges that more of us need to live the Golden Rule. He asks if it would be naive to think that this could change the world. And his answer is: it is naive to think that we can survive without it.

I carry his words as well as those of Buddha, Jesus, Confucius and Socrates. I carry these people with me all the time because it is an ancient wisdom. It is an unchanging ancient principle rooted in history that unites us all. It is the only principle that actually applies worldwide. It is the root of every religion. It is historical. And I think it's also political. If you present the Golden Rule to a political side, the people there will agree. Of course, they might interpret the rule differently, but as a basic principle, they would probably agree with it.

The Golden Rule is found in every culture. We survive only when we think of others. In indigenous cultures, people do their daily business not only for themselves, but also for their community. That's how the community survives: we do things for each other. This is a very strong point in Confucianism. Don't do your best to glorify yourself, but to help your whole community.

The Golden Rule is very strong and compels us to stick with it. I think in our VUCA world it would be very easy to throw off the hats and say, "Oh, I don't know, I can't handle it." But if you follow the basic principle of the Golden Rule, it can help you every day to make correct decisions and act accordingly, precisely because the Golden Rule is such a high-level principle.

The forgotten Golden Rule

Thomas: It seems that the Golden Rule has been forgotten in our world, especially in business. Why do you think this is the case?

Kim: I just finished reading *The Healing Organization* by Rajendra Sisodia and Michael Gelb¹⁵⁶. Among other things, they write about the creation of the U.S. Constitution with Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. At the time, they had consulted in advance with a group of American Indians who had formed an Iroquois Confederacy of seven tribes to try to work together and make peace. They had a system of government that was largely adopted into the U.S. Constitution.

Unfortunately, they forgot two elements:

One was the women's council, which had to give final approval to all decisions, even if formally the men ruled. So, there was a balance between male and female qualities.

Second, every time they made a decision, they asked how it would affect the seventh generation. In other words, it was long-term thinking.

Neither element was included in the U.S. Constitution.

The second thing that happened at the time of the writing of the Constitution was that Adam Smith was formulating his theory of capitalism. It was not just about making money but making money as a reward. Money unlocked creativity, it unlocked the ability of people who had a good idea to actually develop that idea and make business out of it. But Smith had balanced that with social justice.

Unfortunately, this idea of social justice, or say the feminine qualities of caring for one another, was also absent from the U.S. Constitution. Consequently, the original idea of capitalism was lost.

I think this is a pretty good explanation of how the Golden Rule and the principle of balance have been lost over a long period of time.

Viktor Frankl describes in his book *...Saying Yes to Life Anyway*¹⁵⁷, how he survived the concentration camps. In the last pages of his book, he talks about the Statue of Liberty, which must be reconciled with the Statue of Responsibility. Yes, we can do our best for ourselves, but we must also do our best for the community. The same is true for the economy.

Reviving the Golden Rule and prerequisites

Thomas: What does it take to revive the Golden Rule in today's world, both on an individual level and on a group and business level?

Kim: Every day we have the opportunity to choose the Golden Rule.

Historian Karen Armstrong studied all the religions of the world. She found that the one thing they all have in common is the idea of compassion. In her book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*¹⁵⁸, she describes the idea of the struggle between reptilian and mammal brains.

The reptilian brain is the one that is about survival of the fittest. So, it's about fight, flight, food and reproduction. It's about your survival as an individual. On the other hand, there is the mammal brain, which is about caring for someone, feeding them, teaching them, taking care of them, and thinking of others and the community. So, it is the loving side, the caring side.

I think you have to start with yourself and decide which side of that spectrum you want to be on. Do you want to be the destroyer or the builder, the taker or the giver, the war monger or the peace-maker who finds solutions? Do you want to be the one who shouts or the one who listens, do you want to intimidate or collaborate, do you want to be intolerant or tolerant, selfish or generous, a divisive or a unifying person?

From my point of view, the Golden Rule helps us to move toward the mammal side once we have overcome this survival mode. We always have a choice. Once you understand that and hopefully you decide to be on the mammal side, it will be reflected in your relationships with other people. So, practice the Golden Rule with your family and at home. Then take it out into your work world - whether as a member of a team or in a leadership role on a team.

There is one thing that is really important to know about the Golden Rule. Namely, it has three prerequisites: The first thing it presupposes and requires is empathy. This means listening to what the other person needs.

Second, it takes courage to engage. Because empathy alone does not necessarily require action or commitment. We can be empathetic with each other, but then go our separate ways and don't get involved.

For this reason, the third requirement for the Golden Rule is action.

So, first empathy, then courage, and then action.

Practical examples

Thomas: How can I, as an individual, make a difference in my daily life by applying the Golden Rule? Is that even possible? Can you give a few examples where you have experienced or witnessed the Golden Rule in action?

Kim: *The Healing Organization*¹⁵⁹ gives many examples of organizations changing the way they operate. Each of these examples is about translating those values into action and creating a more pleasant environment. My favorite example is about Appletree Answers, a telephone service center. They changed the way they operated internally when the owner realized that there was a big difference between the way they treated wage workers and hourly workers. He saw that it was completely unfair that hourly workers were working on the edge of survival, while wage workers were at the mercy of less or none of that. He wanted to change that. The company had corporate values. However, upon investigation, it was found that they were simply too abstract and didn't really say much about the culture. As a result, he was determined to be a healing and connecting company instead of a hurting and excluding one. He changed a lot of things: from how IT was run to how payroll was run. Employees became more productive and loyal to the company. There was less turnover, and the company's operations became more efficient and profitable.

I have a friend who works as a private equity investor. He is quite an impulsive person and can get angry very easily. When he read our book *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation*, he thought a lot about the Golden Rule. He reflected on himself and realized that he could completely change the way he did business. Today, he only invests in companies that add positive value to the world. His motive is no longer just to make money, but to make a difference. He integrates the Golden Rule at all levels. He is courteous to his employees. He invests more in training his team. He shares his profits equitably.

I'll give you another example: The other day I went to an event in London where a businessman was being honored. There were about fifty people there who he had mentored all his life. I talked to three of his mentees and asked what they had learned from him. And they all said, 'The first thing he told us was to get married.' Which he wasn't about us getting married. It was about learning how to love. Because when you're married, you immediately become less selfish and you're willing to make a commitment to give." They were very grateful because they had learned a lot about love.

One of them worked at McKinsey in an atmosphere that was very results-oriented, intense, and performance-driven. He shared, "I have a small team that I love. I have a vested interest in them. Conversely, they have a vested interest in me. We have a very good relationship." He explained that he was very different from all of his other colleagues in this regard. He said he didn't know anyone who would develop such a bond with his employees. And, of course, his team was very successful.

It's easy to take a personal interest in your employees. And it is repaid in loyalty and commitment and a desire to work hard to make the company successful.

The Golden Rule and imaginal cells

Thomas: Your book about the Golden Rule is called *Imaginal Cells*. What do imaginal cells have to do with the Golden Rule?

Kim: Imaginal cells are latent cells of a future butterfly. When a caterpillar dissolves in its cocoon and creates this chaotic stew, the imaginal cell becomes active. The old cells sense the presence of the new cell and actually begin to attack the new cell. But the imaginal cell sends out a frequency and the imaginal cells find each other so they can group, work together and then multiply. Eventually they reach a turning point and the old cells of the caterpillar recede and dissolve.¹⁶⁰

The common frequency of the imaginal cell is the Golden Rule for us. Because when enough people live by the Golden Rule, we find each other and work together.

People who are transformed we call "imaginicals". It is a play on the word "imagination" because imaginal cells are latent and have the vision of the butterfly.

If enough "imaginicals" work together, we can reach the tipping point where more of us want to move toward this butterfly world. The hope is that we will outsmart and overcome the old way of doing things.

The metaphor of an imaginal cell stands for me for the hope that we all overcome this populism that fights against new ways, because in the new world you have to be generous and not selfish.

In search of a shortcut

Thomas: The metamorphosis of a caterpillar is a phase of complete dissolution. Don't you think this image might be a little too scary for traditionalists who are very much interested in the Golden Rule, but are afraid of having to give up everything they have worked so hard and for so long for? The question is, is there no shortcut?

Kim: A shortcut to peace and harmony in the world? Confucius taught the Golden Rule two and a half thousand years ago, and we are still struggling with his teachings. So, no, I think this is an eternal goal.

Let's be realistic. There will always be people who disagree with it. But it's about finding enough people who want it. That's really the hope.

Imaginal cell and humanity

Thomas: What is the relationship of metamorphosis to the human being? Is it the imaginal cell of our humanity or the core of being human?

Kim: Yes, it's really the core.

Let's go back to the mammal analogy: we have a caring sense built into us. People have done studies on young children in which they were given the choice of being selfish or caring and sharing. A large majority of the children wanted to share. Children have a high and innate sense of fairness and justice. But it is fragile, and the environment can completely erase it if those around them are not careful. It depends on who their role models are.

Thomas: If I understand correctly, the imaginal cell is a dormant cell with a different DNA than the caterpillar and awakens during metamorphosis. If we relate this image to us, I ask myself how do we find our inner butterfly? How do we access our own imaginal cells?

Kim: I think the most important part is learning to be honest. You have to be honest with yourself. And then start with the Golden Rule and treat others the way you want to be treated.

So, what do I want? I think most people want others to treat them with integrity, respect, honesty, generosity and kindness. Most people want that.

Our education system is designed to win, to be the best, to be better than everyone else. And that's fine. But you have to combine that with a sense of, "Okay, let's take everybody along for the ride."

I had a long conversation with a man in New York who works with people in the financial industry. He explained that it is difficult to be honest with yourself. It really is difficult. But when you're honest with yourself, you realize what you really want, and you want to figure out how to get there.

I asked him what he had found out that people really wanted. He said it's not about things, money and status. Deep down, we are social beings. We want love in our lives. We want companionship. We need connections with people. So, it's about figuring out what's really important, and then figuring out how to get there.

Compensation

Thomas: Sometimes I wonder why we don't trust our natural being more often and instead try to control everything for a false, unnatural sense of security. There has to be a balance between the two.

Kim: Yes. We just need to understand where certain concepts come from and find a balance.

Young people often have the idea that they want to save the world. Then they join a company and have to do certain things to keep their job that are not necessarily in line with their personal values. Fortunately, more and more people are questioning the values of the company they work for and trying to help those companies think beyond the so-called "bottom line" of making money.

For example, in late 2018, employees at Google offices around the world organized a strike to protest how the company handled sexual harassment. Google employees worldwide quit in protest of the company's treatment of women and handling of sexual assault cases.

Let's remember what I said before: The Golden Rule requires not only empathy, but also courage and drive.

The Golden Rule and humanity in the digital age

Thomas: How can the Golden Rule help us to become and be human in the digital age?

Kim: Look, our human need is really about connectivity and our desire to communicate with each other. We're doing that today more than ever. That's what social media and the Internet has been and continues to be about - connecting us. And they've done it amazingly well. The question, however, is how authentic the communication is. Because if it's brief, it's easy to misinterpret what's being said, and there's no time to really engage with full explanations.

So, in fact, in the digital age, there is a feedback loop of lack of real connection and terrible communication. In other words, technology promotes connection in a big way. But it also drives us apart. That's a big challenge for us in the digital world. Social media rewards bad behavior by making more clicks more interesting to people than sincere compassion for good things.

The question is whether there are new algorithms that can cope with these negative sides. It is a challenge for the developers of technologies and especially artificial intelligence to eliminate the prejudices and negative things that artificial intelligence learns from humans.

So far, the negative side, the reptilian traits, are emphasized in these learning technologies. But we have to ask ourselves how we switch this around so that artificial intelligence learns the good side. And how do we anchor this development in the form of traditional, sincere communication and not as - as is common today - superficial interaction on the Internet?

In your book, you repeatedly point out that it is more important to ask how we want to live rather than what the future will look like. I add the question, "How can we shape the future responsibly?"

Most of the time, technology divides people. Take targeted advertising or spreading conspiracy theories, misleading news and outdated beliefs.

I think this is where technology actually does something nowadays compared to the past, I mean the time of Buddha or Socrates or Confucius. They had limited influence because of the lack of technology, they could only talk to a certain number of people in their lifetime, and they had limited travel. But now we have these amazing technologies available to us through which we can talk to the whole world. We have the incredible opportunity today to make the Golden Rule known everywhere. So, I think technologies can be a driving force for good and a great influence compared to earlier times.

Thomas: In short, in a VUCA world, people are looking for guidance and principles to live by. This is where the Golden Rule comes in. I believe that the Golden Rule is not just a tool. It's a connector or, as you put it, a catalyst for us to get to the next level where we can act as human beings again. And technology can help with that. Would you agree with that?

Kim: Yes!

Symbiosis of inner and outer design spaces

A symbiosis is an interrelationship between two different organisms that are dependent on each other or derive a benefit from the other. That is, both partners thus have an advantage that they would not have on their own. As I wrote at the end of the second part, it is important and necessary to first become clear about the inner creative spaces and to fill them. The only thing is that if we stay there and do not take our insights out into the world, this will remain an individual exercise with only limited reach. But then the goal of using the digital age to be more human again and to shape the future accordingly would no longer be attainable. Conversely, it would be superficial to only think about and shape the external design spaces without taking into account the individual, personal design spaces. Both design spaces, inner and outer, allow us to unfold our humanity and creativity. But only when they interact can we unleash the full potential that lies within them. In this respect, we should consider both spaces. Then the question of symbiosis arises and how we can ensure it.

This is where the Golden Rule comes into play, providing valuable impetus both for both design spaces taken individually and for their interaction. The Golden Rule offers an important orientation as to how we can and want to shape companies, life and work. And it can help us to create a symbiosis between people and business and thus lay the foundation for Human Business. Human Business is therefore an example of a symbiosis of inner and outer design spaces.

The Golden Rule and the design of life

The shaping of life is first and foremost about us as individuals. When the Golden Rule appeals to us to treat our neighbor as we would like to be treated, this presupposes that we know how we want to be treated. It is good if we have compassion for others. However, if we have never felt compassion for ourselves, compassion is more like sacrifice than genuine compassion. The same applies to answering the question of how we want to live. Some-

As Kim Polman explained in the interview, we have to start with ourselves when implementing the Golden Rule. The most obvious relationship we have is with ourselves. It is, as we saw in part two, sometimes also the most difficult. And yet it is also the foundation for an authentic relationship with others. Shaping life begins with us. But it remains imperfect if we do not share it with others. In a sense, it can be said that shaping life sometimes requires the symbiosis of at least two people. As Kim Polman explained, most people want others to treat them with integrity, respect, honesty, generosity and kindness. After all, that's exactly what the Golden Rule calls for: Treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated. You can't have one without the other. Both are important on their own, but only when they work together can a symbiotic relationship develop.

The Golden Rule and business design

At first glance, the Golden Rule seems to apply only to interpersonal relationships of couples, in families, among friends, in groups or societies. Companies do not seem to be the primary address. But this appearance is deceptive. Even though most companies still treat their employees as resources, it does not change the fact that we are dealing with people. And where there are people, there are interpersonal relationships. Those who see employees only as resources are closing their eyes to reality. At the same time, companies that act in this way are missing a huge opportunity to improve their performance in the long term. Studies¹⁶¹ show that employee engagement has a significant impact on the performance of companies and thus on the economy as a whole. This makes it all the more sobering to note that only 15% of employees worldwide are truly engaged in their work.¹⁶² The majority of the working population is not fully engaged in their work. 18% are even actively disengaged.¹⁶³

If you dig deeper to find out why, the findings are surprising. For it is not so much the lack of expensive investments in companies as primarily soft factors that are lacking in companies. The younger generation of the working population in particular misses:

- Respect and recognition of the individual,
- Tolerance, inclusion and openness as well as
- different ideas or ways of thinking.

It is also the younger generation that demands that companies think outside the traditional box. They expect a balance in their goals. In addition to the aforementioned inclusion and diversity in the workplace, these include positively impacting society and the environment, creating innovative ideas, products and services, and creating jobs, career development and improving people's lives. The focus is no longer on companies, but on people, society and the environment.

Development of a corporate culture characterized by trust and respect

If we scale the Golden Rule from the interpersonal to the corporate level, it is a call for human and ethical entrepreneurship, or Human Business. As former CEO of Unilever and Chairman of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Paul Polman, says, "We must move instead to a mindset of partnering for the common good, founded on joint accountability and responsibility to put our businesses to the service of society, not the other way round."¹⁶⁶

This has nothing to do with esotericism. They are hard facts that prove the advantages of ethical and humane entrepreneurship. Admittedly, it is an art to achieve a balance between short-, medium- and long-term goals. But this should not be used as an excuse for not tackling this challenge. In fact, such a balance helps to develop stability and orientation in the VUCA world. In this respect, it is only beneficial and in one's own interest for companies to maintain trusting relationships with customers, employees and the community. Conversely, this orientation has a direct impact on day-to-day operations. "If a company's goal and mission is to improve the lives of its customers, then abuse of trust or societal harm caused by frivolous behavior becomes not only an ethical issue, but also a matter of business strategy."¹⁶⁷ It is about developing a corporate culture characterized by trust and respect, it is about a symbiosis of customers, employees and companies that are all beneficiaries in interaction and in mutual consideration, respect and support. That is why the Golden Rule is a core value of Human Business.

Against the parasites

The extreme opposite of such a symbiosis would be parasitism. Instead of togetherness, companies are still the focus of thought and action here. Employees are treated merely as resources. Impacts on the environment or society are downplayed as long as short-term goals such as a high share price are achieved. Unfortunately, this form of parasitism and exploitation of people and the environment is still widespread.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

A ray of hope for change toward a better world is the catalog of 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2016. The most important thematic areas at the social, economic and ecological levels include:

- Peace
- Food security and sustainable agriculture
- Water and hygiene improvement
- Energy
- Education
- Poverty reduction
- Health
- Means of implementing the SDG process
- Climate change
- Environment / natural resource management
- Employment



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Source: <https://unsdg.un.org>)

Since the adoption of the Development Goals, there have been a multitude of actions at the international, national, regional and local levels to translate the goals into concrete action.¹⁶⁸ Here, too, we see the Golden Rule in action: let's treat each other and our planet as each one of us would like to be treated.

From me to we

In a world that is changing ever more rapidly, becoming more complex and opaque, and where technology both connects us and makes us lonely, it seems a hopeless endeavor for one individual to make the world at least a little bit better. But the Golden Rule teaches us otherwise. It is not a question of "How can I make a difference?"; but "How can we make a difference together?"¹⁶⁹ In other words, the Golden Rule helps us to move from the "me" to the "we".

If we remember the three prerequisites for the Golden Rule, we get a round picture:

1. **The first requirement is empathy.** This is a call to open oneself to others, to see and hear them. But empathy, as well as symbiosis, does not mean giving up oneself, nor does it mean merging with the other, for example, to enable a stable bond. Just as two dancers can form a unity as a dance couple, ultimately, they remain two individual dancers. Only, in togetherness they are more than the sum of their individual parts. This is symbiosis and synergy.
2. **The second prerequisite of the Golden Rule is courage.** This requires confidence in one's own abilities and inclinations, such as curiosity and creativity. It is the courage to question and overcome old concerns and behavioral patterns that limit us in our humanity and to enter new territory.
3. **The third prerequisite is action.** We do not explore the future by lamenting or overanalyzing. Ideas and words are not worth much if they are not implemented. It is important to act with foresight. The tradition of the Iroquois tribe of North America of asking how the seventh generation can benefit from something in the future can be a good guide in making far-reaching decisions.

As old as the Golden Rule is, it is still relevant today. And it is just as valuable to us as a guideline for shaping the digital age.

Further ideas and exercises

- Where have you already applied the Golden Rule in the past?
Where and how do you practice it today?
- How can you apply the Golden Rule in your private, social or professional life? What could change as a result?
- How can we inspire our fellow human beings, companies and organizations and politicians to act more according to the Golden Rule?
- In 1948, a high school teacher in Los Angeles conducted an experiment: Students were asked to live by the Golden Rule without telling their parents. Later, many vowed to live that way forever. Think about where you can conduct a similar experiment.

Part 4:
Opening Change



Having learned about the fundamentals of Human Business in Part 1 and gathered impetus for rediscovering our human being and shaping our future in Part 2 and 3, we now turn to the question of what can help us in the metamorphosis from traditional to Human Business.

The Agile framework for modern working serves as an entry point for this in Chapter 15. We explore the extent to which Agile working can be a path to Human Business and thus serve as a door opener to Human Business. Agile provides human creativity a structure for free development in small, interdisciplinary, self-organizing and networked teams. In contrast, bureaucracy strangles free creativity by not giving creativity room to unfold and shape itself. Agile working alone, however, is not yet sufficient for the change toward modern, people-oriented action in work and business.

In Chapter 16, we therefore combine the principles of Agile working with the values and principles of Human Business. As we will see, this combination facilitates the shift from traditional practice to a human-oriented approach to shaping our future and the establishment of Human Business. Leadership in Human Business, human leadership, is characterized by a clear focus on customer delight, holistic and sustainable value creation, the promotion of human design and workspaces, and continuous self-improvement. At the same time, human leadership is role independent. Anyone can practice it.

This does not happen automatically. When we talk about Human Business design in Chapter 17, we must not make the mistake of thinking that we can simply sketch and plan a Human Business on a drawing board. True transformation results from learning and growing. Practices help shape that transformation. But without internalizing the values and principles of Human Business, any effort for sustainable change will fall flat. This is true for established companies as well as for start-ups or new projects.

The question of whether we are overwhelmed by the VUCA world or whether we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by it is a question of perspective and attitude. The concluding Chapter 18 reminds us that we ourselves can choose and thus control our perspective and attitude. Either we focus on the past or we embrace the present and look to the future. The VUCA world is the new normal. It is a wake-up call to actively shape our lives and work. The remaining question to be answered is whether being human is possible in the digital age and how we can use it to shape our future.



15. Agile Door Openers

“In the emerging Agile age, momentum is focused on human beings creating delight for other human beings.”

Steve Denning

Key points

- The basic motivation of the authors of the Agile manifesto is to treat people as such and not just as “capital”.
- In today’s world, how people do the work and how they relate to the work is central to how they feel. The basic idea of Agile is that the people who work inspire the people who are worked for.
- Agile is characterized by three key features:
 - working in small, interdisciplinary and self-organizing teams
 - A strong focus on delighting customers and generating value for them
 - Understanding the organization as a fluid and transparent network of stakeholders working together to achieve the common goal of delighting customers
- At its core, Agile is not a set of methods, but a framework or set of rules for modern working.
- Bureaucracy is a hierarchy in which people are not given the space and authority to use their talents. This is another reason why bureaucracies and hierarchies are overwhelmed with today’s world and cannot cope with it.
- The Agile framework offers creativity a structure for free development in small, interdisciplinary, self-organizing and networked teams. In contrast, bureaucracy strangles free creativity by not giving creativity room to unfold and shape itself.
- Introducing and internalizing Agile working takes time, discipline, courage and stamina, active collaboration in small, interdisciplinary and networked teams and, last but not least, an honest and sustainable focus of the work on the customer(s).

In the previous chapters, the constricting effect of bureaucracy and Tayloristic management and the corresponding management were mentioned again and again. Less as a general criticism of these approaches than as an indication of their limitations. As much as they have served us well in the past decades, they are of little help in shaping a VUCA world. The intention of bureaucracy was and is to offer reliability and security in a stable world. Traditional business was, and is, trimmed for rapid growth and short-term profits. In a reasonably predictable world, this worked well. But that world is a thing of the past. So, bureaucracy and traditional business are reaching their limits because both circumstances and our views of modern and sustainable business have changed. The crucial question is how to break free from these shackles. The concept of Human Business is a vision and guide for both companies and organizations. However, the question for traditional business is what options are available to take and shape the way forward. One of these ways is the so-called Agile approach to leadership, management and product development. In summary, we are talking about “Agile”¹⁷⁰. Therefore, in this chapter we will learn about the values and principles of Agile working. We will not go into depth. For that, there are plenty of books, websites, conferences and more. A deep dive is definitely worthwhile, and anyone interested is encouraged to do so.



What does “Agile” mean?

Agile is a global movement that is permanently changing the way we work in business.¹⁷¹ It has grown significantly in importance and popularity since 2001. Back then, seventeen people met at the American ski resort of Snowbird to ski, relax, talk, and share commonalities of modern software development.¹⁷² The conversations were about figuring out how to deliver good products to customers in an environment “that not only talks about ‘people as the most important asset,’ but also behaves as if people are the most important thing, not just ‘asset.’” The participants summarized the results of their discussions in the “Agile Manifesto of Software Development,” which was to become the foundation of Agile development.

The manifesto reads as follows¹⁷³:

We are uncovering better ways of [doing what we do], by doing it and helping others to do the same. Through this work, we have come to value:

- **Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.**
- **[Customer visible value] over comprehensive documentation.**
- **Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.**
- **Responding to change over following a plan.**

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.”¹⁷⁴

Although initially focused on software development, the Manifesto has been applied and developed in many other industries.¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, the Agile Manifesto is about finding better ways to develop products and services - not just software - by doing it instead of just talking about it and sharing the experience with others. It is wrong to claim that the Manifesto is throwing out time-honored values or practices. It only declares that the new, Agile values have a higher practical value. In this way, the manifesto builds a bridge from the old, traditional world to the Agile world.

A new approach to business - Interview with Steve Denning

In recent years, Agile has become increasingly popular in business. Nevertheless, the scope of Agile is not always understood. Many users see Agile primarily as one of many methods to achieve their business goals. Even though Agile entails many methodological approaches, Agile is much more than a toolbox. I spoke with Steve Denning about why and to what extent this is the case.

Denning is a management thought leader and is considered one of the most important trailblazers in the Agile world. He is a former manager at the World Bank and the author of several books, including *The Leader's Guide to Radical Management* and his latest, *The Age of Agile*¹⁷⁶. His regular column in Forbes is read and referenced by thousands worldwide.



Steve Denning (Photo ©Steve Denning)

Three factors of Agile

Thomas: Why Agile?

Steve: Because nothing else works. The world has changed. Top-down bureaucracy, command-and-control leadership don't work in this world. So, something else had to be developed. That is, more flexible and adaptable approaches that rely on the talents of the people doing the actual work and really excite people for whom the work is being done and are good for the society in which the work is being done. These three factors lead to something that is timely and actionable.

The core of Agile - the three laws

Thomas: What is Agile at its core?

Steve: A mindset or way of thinking, a set of attitudes and values, a philosophy or way of looking at the world - all these terms fit. The Agile mindset consists of three elements or laws, namely the law of the customer, the law of the small team, and the law of the network. It is very different from the mindset with which top-down bureaucracies are staffed and thrive.

Thomas: Why are these three laws so important for understanding Agile?

Steve: In the 20th century, the company was the center of the universe. Then the power shifted to the customer. Now the customer is the center of the universe. The customer is the boss. In the 20th century, the company was the boss. Today, the customer has options and has reliable information about those options. He can communicate with other customers via social media to influence verbal dialogue about those options. Even if individual customers seem powerless, collectively they are very powerful. This is the reason why this is becoming a business purpose. This is an old idea that Peter Drucker formulated back in 1954. At the time, however, it did not have much success. However, with the increasing influence of the customer, it is becoming clearer and clearer that the customer is the corporate purpose.

You start with the **why**, as Simon Sinek¹⁷⁷ says. The why for the existence of the business is the customer. It is the fact that you have a customer who is willing to pay for the services or the product.

Then the question is **how to** delight the customer. And the first step is small teams that draw on the talents of the people who do the work, are close to the customer and can find out what would excite them. They work in short cycles and close to the customer and in this way they get feedback from the customer and continuously work on delivering more value to the customer.

Then the question is **where** these teams work. They work in a network, not hierarchies and bureaucracies as they did in the 20th century. The network allows the teams to bring in the talents of the people who work to delight the customer and create value for the company and well-being for survival.

The role of humans in agility

Thomas: What role do we as humans play in the Agile approach compared to the traditional one?

Steve: Both customers and those doing the work are people. The basic idea of Agile is that humans doing the work inspire the humans being worked for. It is ethical and meaningful to inspire other people. This creates fulfilling work and satisfaction for customers, and they are willing to pay money. This is very different from the 20th century mindset, where the people who did the work were treated as things, human resources that were discarded once they were no longer useful. Moreover, what they thought of the work was largely irrelevant.

In today's world, how people do the work and how they approach the work, what they feel, is of key importance. Because the work depends on the people doing the work being inspired to create more joy for the customers. And so, the feelings of the people doing the work suddenly become central. Hierarchical thinking and acting will not work here. Bureaucracy is a hierarchy where people are not given the space and authority to use their talents. This is another reason why bureaucracies and hierarchies are overwhelmed with today's world and cannot cope with it. They cannot attract the talents they would need to do so.

What comes after Agile transformation?

Thomas: When we talk about Agile transformation, the question is what comes after this transformation. What comes next?

Steve: You just keep improving, there's no end. It's a never-ending journey. If you ever stop improving, you go backwards, and you lose

your business. So, there is no end. This also means that when someone says, "we've become Agile," they don't really know what they're talking about.

Agile remains the basis for everything. But we can now see more clearly what some of the evolutions are, e.g., an expanded view of leadership, an increased role for empathy, capacity to create new businesses, platforms, ecosystems, and managing data as an asset.

Thomas: So, you wouldn't say that Agile is just a fad?

Steve: No, it's deeply rooted in the social and economic structures of the 21st century. There's no going back. More than 90% of executives recognize that. They want to be Agile, even though they don't know how to become Agile. The problem is that it takes quite a while. It's quite difficult to move from a bureaucracy to an Agile organization. There are a lot of companies that claim to be Agile but really aren't. I refer to this as "Agile in name" or "fake Agile." This is something that practices the outer ceremonies of Agile but is not really Agile. It's bureaucracy with a different label.

An operational Agile framework

As Steve Denning explained, Agile is much more than a collection of modern methods. At its core, Agile is not a set of methods, but a framework and a philosophy. In other words, it is a kind of set of rules for modern work, comparable to the set of rules in a sport, let's say soccer. Here it is described how large the playing field is, which rules are to be observed. How the game is ultimately designed, well, that depends on the teams and its players. And here there are truly great differences.

At the operational working level, the Agile framework stands on three pillars:

1. **Roles and Responsibilities:** Description of core roles
2. **Requirements:** Explanation of how requirements for products or services are recorded, prioritized, and maintained.
3. **Delivery mode:** explanation of how products or services (e.g., software) are delivered

Let's briefly review these three pillars.

Roles and responsibilities

In the operational Agile framework, there are usually three core roles:

Product Owner

- He or she is responsible for the product vision. This means that the product owner must ensure that there is a product vision.
- He or she represents the customer(s). He or she bundles the customer's requirements and needs, summarizes them and prioritizes them.
- He or she represents management to the team.

Team moderator

The facilitator is not a traditional project manager. He is more comparable to the captain of a sports team. Thus, he is responsible for

- Removing obstacles in the team,
- Preventing interruptions in the team and product development,
- Moderating the team,
- Supporting the process or the Agile framework and
- Managing the management. In this role, he is the first interface to the product owner, who represents the management to the team.

Team

It has been found that the optimal team size is between five and nine employees.¹⁷⁸ Ideally, the team can work together in one place, is interdisciplinary in composition and organizes its work on its own. This self-organizing team is responsible for

- Defining its operational tasks,
- Appreciating efforts for his work,
- Developing the commissioned product(s),
- Ensuring the quality of its own work and of the product(s) to be developed, and
- Further developing and improving the Agile framework with its rules and processes.

Whether a team defines further roles is its responsibility and differs from project to project or from product development to product development. The three aforementioned roles of product owner, team moderator, and team form the foundation of most Agile teams. It is important to understand that roles and responsibilities and rules of

collaboration are not fixed and bureaucratically enforced. They are flexible and adaptive, based on the team's needs, requirements, and tasks. This distinguishes them from a bureaucratic set of rules.

Requirements

In the Agile approach, customer requirements are recorded in a so-called **product backlog**, a list of all requirements. The product owner is responsible for the backlog. He must ensure that the product backlog is created, prioritized and maintained. It should be noted that the requirements can change during the course of the project or product development - either thematically or in terms of priorities. This means that the requirements in the Product Backlog are not fixed and carved in stone for all times. Rather, a Product Backlog provides a limited view of future requirements from the customer(s). The regular maintenance of the Product Backlog, i.e., a review of the coherence and consistency, sorting and prioritization of the requirements, is the responsibility of the Product Owner. He is usually supported in this by the team.

Delivery

Instead of delivering a new product or service only at the end of a project or product development, the understanding of Agile is to deliver something with added value to the customer in regular time intervals or iterations. This delivery mode is called **iterative** and **incremental**. For example, one wants to be able to deliver a piece of working software to the customer after a fairly short period of time, even if the overall work is not yet finished. This is always of great advantage when the customer's requirements are still unclear or can still change. The customer is also kept up to date on the progress of the development with the help of the intermediate results.¹⁷⁹

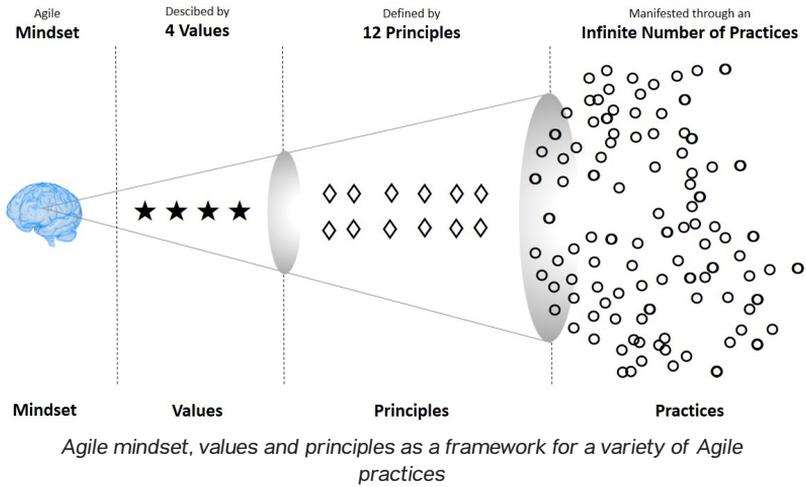
Agile structure as a prerequisite for creativity

As simple as the Agile framework looks, it can easily be misconstrued as a blueprint. It isn't. Agile is not an engineering feat that can be described in complicated processes and instructions. It defines a structure or framework within which teams can operate. Creativity is not restricted by the Agile framework but encouraged. One can compare the Agile framework also with a structure like the ABC, with which I can form words and sentences and express myself in such a way. There are no limits to creativity with the simple rules. Other examples of such structures are the three basic colors, which I can combine and mix at will and thus create an infinite number of color tones, or the notes on a scale and various rhythms, with which I can conjure up an infinite amount of music. And even a painter's canvas and his tools like paints and brushes form a structure. How the painter creates this structure, this canvas or this artistic space is up to him.

A structure does not hinder creativity. A structure is a prerequisite for creativity. In other words, without structure there is no creativity. The Agile framework is such a structure. In contrast, bureaucracy strangles free creativity by restricting the necessary freedom to develop and shape creativity or by taking it away altogether.

However, Agile is not the solution for all areas of work. In environments where changes do not exist and do not have to be expected, or where you want to exclude them completely, an Agile approach can be less effective than in a VUCA environment, for example.

Nor does Agile claim a certain level of completeness, and Agile practices are constantly evolving. Agile is anything but complete, but it doesn't have to be. The structure of the Agile framework is sufficient for developing and designing new products and services. Thus, there are a variety of Agile practices. To single out one practice or methodology as the only true one would be wrong and incompatible with Agile values and principles. Rather, it is the case that the Agile mindset, its values and principles offer the framework for an infinite number of Agile practices. Graphically, we can represent this as follows.¹⁸⁰



However, if Agile is practiced without internalizing and living the Agile principles and values, it is not Agile, but a form of fake Agile.

Prerequisites for Agile

Agile working does not fall from the sky. Introducing and internalizing Agile working takes time, discipline, courage and stamina, especially if you have worked in more traditional environments up until now.

Agile work requires active collaboration. Ideally, Agile teams are stable, which means they can work together over a period of time, thus becoming more familiar with each other and continuously improving their teamwork and results.

Agile teams are composed on an interdisciplinary basis. This enables the team to develop and take responsibility for new products and services from start to finish. Interdisciplinary teams also open up new perspectives and approaches. This is particularly advantageous when looking for and developing real innovations.

One of the most important prerequisites for successful Agile teams and Agile working is an honest and sustainable focus on the customer. The primary goal here is not to satisfy the needs of one's own company or organization, but to inspire the customer. Ultimately, without customers there is no company. And so, the mantra of an Agile company is also to focus on its customers and to inspire them.¹⁸¹

Agile turns traditional business management on its head

The fact that Agile turns traditional corporate management on its head sounds less radical than it really is. Denning (2010) even describes the changed focus away from the company and toward the customer as a Copernican revolution in management. In the past, or in traditional companies, the customer revolved around the company. The company decided what the customer could buy. In times of incomplete information, a wonderful solution. Only today, as customers become more informed thanks to the Internet, they are also gaining power and influence. It is no longer the customer who revolves around the company - the company revolves around the customer. Whereas in traditional management the company's purpose was primarily the manufacture and sale of products and services, in modern, Agile management it is customer delight. This is reflected, among other things, in customer-driven iterations - as opposed to general-staff-generated grand plans that took a long time to implement and often bypassed true customer needs.

The Copernican turn in management has further implications for organization and leadership in the company. While work structures in traditional companies were characterized by hierarchy and bureaucracy, in Agile companies one increasingly finds autonomous and self-organizing teams. In any case, employees have a different status in Agile companies. Instead of treating them as resources, they are treated and valued as people - incidentally, one of the basic motivations of the authors of the "Agile Manifesto": not only to speak of people as the most important asset, but also to behave in this way and to see and treat people as the most important thing in the company.

In Agile management, employees are involved. Communication takes place in dialog and no longer selectively from the top down. This takes into account the developments of recent decades. Whereas in the days of early industrialization the majority of workers had little or no education, today all employees have a high or even very high level of education. One more reason to treat them accordingly and equally and no longer as inferior resources.

Trust in a company's own employees and the transparency of its work is repaid many times over. Agile teams have been proven to not only have higher productivity and deliver better quality products, but they are also more innovative. Especially in times of constant change, this is certainly a positive.

Agile working is not primarily about higher productivity. Anyone who understands this by “Agile” shows that they are still shackled in the old, Tayloristic way of thinking. Yes, Agile working is usually accompanied by significantly higher productivity. But the decisive factor is that there is more added value for the customer, the company and the employees themselves - with less work at the same time. Extending¹⁸² Agile working to fill the creative freedom with additional work strangles Agile working and would take us back to the old world. This would have nothing to do with Agile but is “fake” and nothing more than traditional management in new clothes.¹⁸³

Finally, let’s compare traditional with modern Agile management in a table.

	Traditional management	Modern, Agile management
Company purpose	Production and sale of products and services	Customer enthusiasm “There is only one valid definition of a business purpose: to create a customer.” Peter Drucker, <i>The Practice of Management</i> Specific examples of impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on customer delight and added value • Delivery of the highest quality in products and services • Time to Market (How quickly can I get my product or service to market?)
Organization	A great plan	Customer-driven iterations
Work structure	Bureaucracy and hierarchy	Autonomous teams
Transparency	That which is necessary to perform work	Radical transparency, open communication
Communication	Top-down, micromanagement	Interactive: stories, questions, dialogue
Impact on employees	Up to 30 % and more are disengaged	High productivity, continuous innovation

Comparison of traditional with modern, Agile management

Let's leave the operational level of Agile working and turn to questions of leadership in the Agile environment in the next chapter. In doing so, we will combine the value propositions of Human Business with the values and principles of Agile working. As we will see, this combination contributes to the shift from traditional, Tayloristic driven action to human-centered design of the future and the establishment of Human Business.



Further ideas and exercises

In 2016, the internationally recognized Scrum trainer Peter Stevens developed a questionnaire for self-assessing one's own agility.¹⁸⁴

Questionnaire to assess your own agility

How "Agile" are you?

What does it mean to have an "Agile mindset or attitude"? This self-assessment is designed to help you think about your agility. If your values align with the Agile Manifesto, you can claim to have an Agile mindset. You can also use this questionnaire to assess an organization or leadership team.

What is an Agile mindset or attitude?

A person who has an Agile mindset and attitude should have understood and internalized at least the first sentence of the Agile Manifesto. That is, with the Agile mindset and attitude, you are always learning.

Someone with an Agile mindset knows what they are doing (besides making money)! What value do you bring to those who are valuable to you? Someone with an Agile mindset finds better ways to do what they do by doing it and helping others do the same. This is about improving your skills, having time to improve your skills and technologies, and learning and sharing knowledge beyond your own four walls.

Finally, someone with an Agile mindset knows what is of value to them. You have reflected on the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto and found that your own beliefs are largely in line with those of the Manifesto. Values are a guide to decision making, so you align your decisions with the Agile Manifesto. Perhaps you have additional values. You may have a reason to disagree with one or more values in your context. The less relevant the Agile values are to you, the more you should ask yourself if you really have an Agile mindset!

Finally, someone with an Agile mindset knows why they value what they value. Values don't have to be followed blindly. You may very well consider values other than the four included in the Agile Manifesto to be important.

Peter's five questions

1. What do you do for those whom you value? The answer must include a verb and is not "make money".
2. Are you finding better ways to do what you do by doing it?
3. Are you finding better ways to do what you do by helping others do the same?
4. Have you thought about the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto and what they mean to you?
5. Can you briefly explain your values and why they are important to you?

Use of this rating

Peter's five Agile self-assessment questions aim to inspire you to think about your level of agility. It's not about a specific practice, nor will you get points for it. The questions are meant to help you think about your values and principles and give you something to think about on your path to agility.

Peter's evaluation sheet:

Your name:

Your company/organization:

For whom are you answering?

for me for my team for someone else (_____)

for my company

for my management

1. what do you/they do besides earn money?
(Your answer must contain a verb)

How well do these statements describe you/you?	How things are	How I would like them
--	----------------	-----------------------

2. we find better ways to do what we do by doing it ourselves.

0-2-4-6-8-10

0-2-4-6-8-10

3. we find better ways to do what we do by helping others do the same (beyond our limits).

0-2-4-6-8-10

0-2-4-6-8-10

4. we have examined our own values in the context of the Agile Manifesto.

0-2-4-6-8-10

0-2-4-6-8-10

5. we can explain why we believe what we believe.

0-2-4-6-8-10

0-2-4-6-8-10

Help with question 4: How important are the Agile values for your daily decision making?

How well do these statements describe you/you?	How things are	How I would like them																											
Individuals and interactions stand above processes and tools.	0-2-4-6-8-10	0-2-4-6-8-10																											
[Visible value to the customer] takes precedence over comprehensive documentation.	0-2-4-6-8-10	0-2-4-6-8-10																											
Cooperation with the customer is above contract negotiation.	0-2-4-6-8-10	0-2-4-6-8-10																											
Responding to change takes precedence over following a plan.	0-2-4-6-8-10	0-2-4-6-8-10																											
Our highest priority is to delight the customer through early and continuous delivery of visible value to the customer.	0-2-4-6-8-10	0-2-4-6-8-10																											
We welcome changing requirements, even late in product development. We use change to the customer's competitive advantage.	0-2-4-6-8-10	0-2-4-6-8-10																											
Bonus question																													
How likely do you think it is that a customer or potential customer will label you as "Agile"?																													
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">Very unlikely</th> <th colspan="3">Possible</th> <th colspan="2">Probably</th> <th colspan="2">Very likely</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td>7</td> <td>8</td> <td>9</td> <td>10</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>										Very unlikely			Possible			Probably		Very likely		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very unlikely			Possible			Probably		Very likely																					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10																				
What reason would customers give?																													

16. Leadership For Change

“Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself.”

Warren Bennis,
pioneer in the field of leadership theory

Key points

- In an Agile environment, attitudes are more important than technologies. Without the management philosophy and practice of employee empowerment, methods and process practices achieve nothing.
- Strong and inspiring leadership in an Agile environment differs from traditional top-down leadership in that it constantly seeks to balance the interests of customers, employees, and the business.
- Human leadership is characterized by a clear focus on customer delight, holistic and sustainable value creation, the promotion of human design and workspaces, and continuous self-improvement.
- Human leadership is independent of role. Anyone can practice it.
- The only way to get people to work on big, risky things - on bold ideas - and to get them to start with the hardest parts of the problem is to make this the path of least resistance for them.
- The traditionally understood purpose of a company - profit maximization - may be valid in the short term and may well serve its purpose. In terms of the whole, however, it is misleading. For it is neither holistic nor sustainable and only a preparation or intermediate step toward the actual meaning and purpose of the company, namely value generation for and by people.
- In a Human Business, employees work for people, both inside and outside the company. It is holistic and meaningful work.
- An Agile company can only become a Human Business when its values and principles align with those of a Human Business.
- The elements of a Human Business are contained in the Agile values and principles. Agile values and principles can help create an environment in which human potential can unfold. They thus serve as a door opener or catalyst for a Human Business.

In search of effective leadership and management practices in the 21st century

In spring 2015, eleven companies founded¹⁸⁵ an international learning community under the organizational auspices of the Global Scrum Alliance. The companies came from very different industries around the world. What they all had in common was an interest and curiosity about how leadership and management practices are changing in the 21st century in terms of:

- the work structure,
- work coordination,
- communication,
- the role of corporate goals and
- systemic change.

After several meetings and visits to selected plants and companies in the learning community, they produced a final report that was presented at the Global Peter Drucker Forum in Vienna in November 2015.¹⁸⁶

The two core insights were:

1. Attitudes are more important than technologies. In other words, without the management attitude of employee empowerment, methods and practices achieve nothing.
2. Strong, inspiring leadership is the key.

Modern management philosophy

Leadership attitude is both a broad and a soft term. A hard, crystal-clear definition is difficult. What members of the learning community consistently observed in successful companies were the following seven elements:

- The focus of the entire company was on generating added value and innovation for (end) customers.
- Empowerment: Managers empowered their employees instead of controlling them.
- Autonomous, self-organizing teams and network of teams were free to evolve and were actively encouraged.
- Work was coordinated through iterative, customer-focused practices.
- Transparency and continuous improvement of the work were lived.
- Open communication and dialogue were cultivated in the company.
- The work environments were openly set up and designed, fostering collaboration within teams and across the company.

Not entirely surprisingly, these are all elements that we can already observe at the operational work level in the Agile world and were described in the previous chapter. Steve Denning explained in the interview in the previous chapter how important it is in today's world how people do the work and how they relate to the work, what they feel. Agile supports this. Because the basic idea of Agile is that the people who work inspire the people who are worked for.

Strong and inspiring leadership

Strong and inspiring leadership in an Agile environment differs from traditional top-down leadership in that it constantly seeks a balance between the interests of customers, employees and the company. It is obvious that this is not always successful. However, strong and inspiring leadership always manages to strike a balance. Not at the expense of others or as a compromise, but as a synergy of customers, employees and the company and constant improvement.

We have already learned about these four elements - customer, employee, company or value creation, and continuous improvement - in Chapter 2 as the value propositions of Human Business. If we combine the insights of the learning community with the value propositions of Human Business, we can derive a set of principles of modern leadership for a human environment that help to develop the human potential in an organization for the benefit of customers, companies and employees. We can thus contribute to the development of a human environment that is characterized by trust and respect as well as by peak performance. High performance less in the sense of optimizing functioning beings or machines - high performance more in the sense of developing potential, expressing and bundling creativity and synergies in the community. Let's take a look at the most important leadership principles and a number of tools that can help us achieve this.



Principles and tools of human leadership

Customer enthusiasm

Customer delight starts with the customer or customers. This is not just about customers' interests and requirements. It is about their needs. To understand them, address them and help solve them, we need to understand the customer, put ourselves in their shoes, walk in their shoes.

As natural as a customer focus is, it is frustrating to realize that many companies, managers and teams have forgotten or simply do not know who their customers are, let alone what their needs are. It is not uncommon for customers to be confused with the interests of superiors, the company, or shareholders. Certainly, they may be customers in their eyes. But they are not customers who keep a company or organization alive. Even shareholders who provide a company with money will then turn away from a company if it is no longer able to serve the actual customers. Therefore, to focus on satisfying the interests and expectations of shareholders and to misuse this as a driver is short-sighted thinking and negligent in business terms in the medium and long term. The winners of such a focus are a few shareholders and managers who reap a bonus because they have optimized short-term profits but forgotten to invest in the future.

Likewise, it would be short-sighted, especially in the digital age, to focus only on existing customers and to satisfy their needs, perhaps even to inspire them, either with existing or with new, innovative products and services. Today's markets are more volatile and dynamic than ever. In such an environment, the entrepreneurial spirit demands to win new customers as well. Be it by introducing existing products and services to new markets or by using market-creating innovations to win both new markets and new customers.

Denning summarizes the different views of a customer in the following table¹⁸⁷:

New customers	Expansion into new markets	Market-creating innovation
Existing customers	Consolidation	Incremental innovation
	Existing products and services	New products and services

If a company concentrates on its existing customers with its existing products and services, it consolidates its market. Customers are served with new products and services in the form of incremental innovations. Customer orientation and corporate alignment gain momentum when a company also wants to bring its existing products and services to new customers. It can thus expand into new markets. It becomes even more dynamic when a company succeeds in selling new products and services to customers who did not exist before. The company thus creates a new market for itself. Because of the fast-moving market and the VUCA environment, Denning argues that companies should increasingly focus on market-creating innovation if they want to survive in the market in the long term.

The focus on delivering real value to customers and creating lasting excitement is reflected in several tools we have already encountered:¹⁸⁸

- **Product or project charters**, i.e., a brief description of an undertaking, initiative or project. Not only does a charter contain information about the motivation, vision and concrete goals of the project, it also names the actual customers and differentiates them from stakeholders, i.e., people or organizational units that have a certain interest in the project but are not customers of the new products or services.
- **Product backlogs** keep the requirements and needs of customers together in a sorted and prioritized list according to value creation and up-

- Work is coordinated through iterative, customer-focused practices.
- The quality of our own products and services is ensured and also delivered.
- A holistic, market-opening strategy is applied to analyze, explore, generate and secure markets and customers. “Holistic” means that both existing and new markets and customers are the focus of analysis, exploration and generation.

Holistic and sustainable value creation

A company cannot live on short-term profits in the long run. There is no doubt that quarterly reported results are important. But they have to be seen in perspective. It is not short-term profits (EBIT) that drive the business, but the health of the company, which includes its customers, employees and the entire organization. A company needs to look at both short-, medium- and long-term value creation. Every organization and business should know where it is coming from, where it wants to go, and what its specific goals are. This is an organization’s MVP, which we learned about in Chapter 11. This MVP, as well as the focus on holistic and sustainable value creation, should be found and reflected in the following tools and practices, among others:

- **Balanced incentive systems** for both individual employees, teams and companies as a whole, with short-, medium- and long-term goals, take into account the four value propositions of Human Business: customer delight, economic value creation, human design and workspace, and continuous improvement.
- **Product or project charters ensure** that the goals and benefits of any endeavor are in alignment with and support the organization’s or company’s MVP.
- **Continuous improvement and innovation** must be promoted and lived. Not only for products and processes, but also for employees and the working environment. Products and processes alone do not innovate - it is people who make the difference. A **holistic approach to innovation** takes this into account. That’s why it goes without saying that employees are involved and recognized in the innovation process.

Human design- and workspace

“Don’t tell your employees how to do things.

Tell them what to do, and then let them surprise you with results.”

George Patton, American general

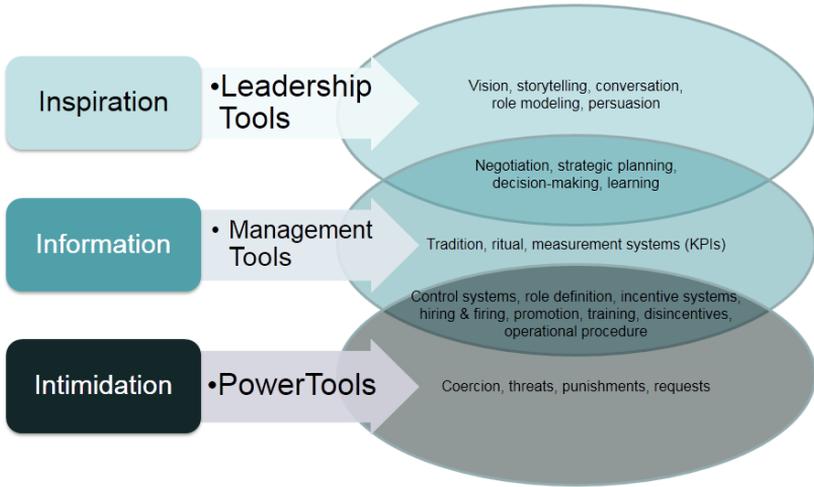
Employees are not functioning resources. They are people and want to be recognized as such. We therefore do well to help them develop their human potential. The actual development of this potential is the responsibility of each individual. What leadership can do, however, is to create an environment in which this unfolding of potential becomes more likely. This includes the following practices and attitudes, among others:

- Treating employees with **trust, respect** and as **human beings**, developing their creativity and potentials
- Promote **employee and leadership development**
- Employee **empowerment: empowering** employees instead of controlling them
- Promote and support the development of autonomous, self-organizing teams and team networks
- Create **open work environments** that foster collaboration and dialogue
- **Inspiring leadership** - moving away from the exercise of power tools such as coercion, threat, punishment, and command, or management tools such as control systems and rigid planning, and toward leadership tools such as storytelling, conversation and dialogue, strategic planning, and learning
- **Promote and recognize performance**
- **Be a role model**

The best way to create a human work and design space is to start and do it yourself.¹⁸⁹ Of course, it is nicer and more comfortable to sit in the made nest. But if that doesn’t exist and no one wants to do it for me, I have to

do it myself. By doing it myself, I can motivate and inspire other employees to support me and shape things together. It is a change from the bottom up. Without question, this can be arduous. But the fruits should be incentive enough.

The following figure compares traditional, more modern, and human management and leadership tools.¹⁹⁰



Leadership and management tools

While traditional leadership uses power and management tools of intimidation and top-down information sharing, both Agile and human leadership seek to inspire. They use leadership tools such as vision development, storytelling, dialogue, role modeling, and persuasion. When necessary, they also use management tools such as negotiation, strategic planning, decision-making, and learning.

Traditional tools such as coercion, threats, punishment, and orders are based on the image of people as will-less work resources. This is contrasted with inspirational tools such as storytelling or dialogue management, through which people are recognized as human beings and treated accordingly. As humans, we are not machines that must function. We are vulnerable, we are not perfect. And at the same time, we can deliver top performance if we are allowed to, or if the environment makes this possible.

It is not really complicated to create such an environment. For this, let's look at how NASA does it and forms high-performance teams in the process. Charles J. Pellerin led the NASA project that repaired the defective Hubble telescope in 2008. After the first failed Hubble mission, the Hubble recovery project went down in history as one of NASA's most successful missions. In his book *How NASA Builds Teams*¹⁹¹, Pellerin summarizes four characteristics of high-performance teams, namely:

- Mutual respect, employees feel valued
- Reality-based optimism, commitment
- People feel included and being trusted
- Clear organizational structure and accountabilities

None of these qualities are technical, they are all interpersonal. In themselves self-evident and unpretentious, all these qualities correspond to common sense. Only, between common sense and practice sometimes lie worlds. There is actually no reason not to ensure these qualities.

There is nothing bad or wrong with performance. Without performance, we will not get far in the 21st century. That's why it's important to recognize performance. This does not always have to be done with money. Recognition means that performance is seen and rewarded.

However, once there is a bonus system linked to performance, it is important that the incentive system rewards holistic and not exclusively selfish or short-term results. It should be a mix of individual as well as team performance and of generating added value for customers, employees and the company and rewarding these, thus encouraging further performance, team spirit and responsibility.¹⁹²

Continuous self-improvement

Striking a balance between customer delight, economic value creation and a human work and design space is difficult - but rewarding. Once achieved, resting would be the wrong recipe. In a dynamic environment, the elements of

Human Business are subject to constant change from within and without. Like the environment, balance is dynamic. That is, maintaining balance may be as difficult and as rewarding as establishing it at the beginning. This means nothing other than that we must constantly strive to keep the three elements in view - as well as changes from within and without. The balance must be maintained, stabilized and thus continuously improved. The prerequisite for this is an active learning culture in the leadership as well as in the entire company or organization. Active learning requires **courage** on the one hand and “**playfulness**” on the other.

Courage because you have to try out new things on your own initiative, question or discard old patterns if necessary, and break new ground. These do not always have to be huge developments or innovations. Smaller incremental changes can also be of great benefit. The important thing is that you are willing to learn and that this is encouraged and demanded.

Playfulness is necessary because it helps us to leave old perspectives behind, to open up to new things and to break down possible limitations in favor of trying things out.

Major innovative breakthroughs cannot be planned. They arise from a multitude of impulses within and outside of one's own immediate environment, are sometimes put together like a jigsaw puzzle from many pieces or are created in interaction with others. It is not for nothing that one of the core requirements of Agile is to work in interdisciplinary teams. The aim is to break down knowledge silos, combine knowledge with each other, and network experience in such a way that something new and greater can emerge.

Anyone who wants to be innovative inevitably makes mistakes. It is problematic when the work environment looks critically at mistakes, possibly frowning upon them or even punishing them. Well, if this really should be the case, we can at least say that such an environment, in which employees are afraid to make mistakes or admit them, has nothing to do with innovation. If you want to enter and explore new territory, you will make mistakes. That's why mistakes should not be punished but acknowledged. The decisive factor is not whether and how many mistakes I make, but what I learn from them and what path I want to take next.

Enthusiastic skepticism is the perfect partner of optimism

We can see how important and valuable a healthy culture of error is at Google subsidiary X. In his TED2016 talk “The unexpected benefit of celebrating failure”, Astro Teller explains¹⁹⁴ how the distinctive error culture in X’s “Moonshot Factory” leads the teams to high performance and to many innovations.

“At X -- formerly called Google X -- you’ll find an aerospace engineer working alongside a fashion designer and former military ops commanders brainstorming with laser experts. These inventors, engineers and makers are dreaming up technologies that we hope can make the world a wonderful place.

We use the word “moonshots” to remind us to keep our visions big -- to keep dreaming. And we use the word “factory” to remind ourselves that we want to have concrete visions -- concrete plans to make them real.

Here’s our moonshot blueprint:

- *Number one: we want to find a huge problem in the world that affects many millions of people.*
- *Number two: we want to find or propose a radical solution for solving that problem.*
- *And then number three: there has to be some reason to believe that the technology for such a radical solution could actually be built.*

But I have a secret for you. The moonshot factory is a messy place. But rather than avoid the mess, pretend it’s not there, we’ve tried to make that our strength. We spend most of our time breaking things and trying to prove that we’re wrong. That’s it, that’s the secret. Run at all the hardest parts of the problem first. Get excited and cheer, “Hey! How are we going to kill our project today?” [...]

Discovering a major flaw in a project doesn’t always mean that it ends the project. Sometimes it actually gets us onto a more productive path. [...]

You cannot yell at people and force them to fail fast. People resist. They worry. “What will happen to me if I fail? Will people laugh at me? Will I be fired?”

I started with our secret. I’m going to leave you with how we actually make it happen. The only way to get people to work on big, risky things—audacious ideas—and have them run at all the hardest parts of the problem first, is if you make that the path of least resistance for them.

We work hard at X to make it safe to fail. Teams kill their ideas as soon as the evidence is on the table because they’re rewarded for it. They get applause from their peers. Hugs and high fives from their manager, me in particular. They get promoted for it. We have bonused every single person on teams that ended their projects, from teams as small as two to teams of more than thirty.

We believe in dreams at the moonshot factory. But enthusiastic skepticism is not the enemy of boundless optimism. It’s optimism’s perfect partner. It unlocks the potential in every idea. We can create the future that’s in our dreams.”

Shape change

Pursuing moonshots, i.e., grand visions, is already a very broad concept. But we can already shape change in small ways. Read through the following at your leisure and reflect on each individual point¹⁹⁵:

What if I

- Listened more
- Assumed positive intent
- Entertained new ideas
- Played the devil’s advocate
- Requested more feedback
- Offered more feedback
- Considered another perspective
- Wished without limits
- Walked in my co-worker’s shoes
- Spent time outside my comfort zone

What if we

- Made an effort to share our histories
- Helped others understand their value
- Encouraged new points of view
- Celebrated success more often
- Changed our surroundings from time to time
- Considered team results as impressive as personal success
- Encouraged risk taking
- Proactively practiced open mindedness
- All respected one another
- Encourage an environment of trust and collaboration
- Created our own innovative culture?

Shift happens.

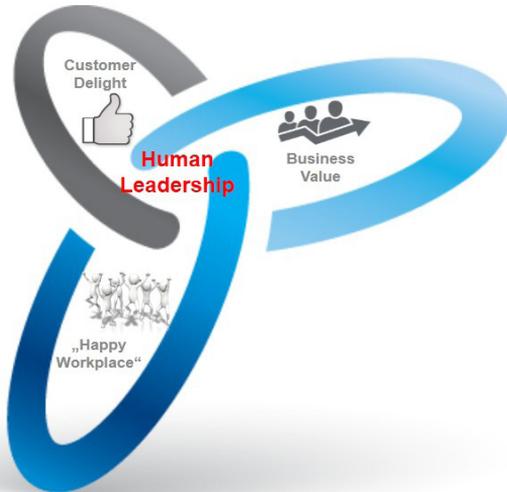
Holistic and meaningful leadership

Each of the principles of human leadership is valuable in its own right. However, it is the combination of these principles that constitutes holistic and meaningful leadership. Figuratively speaking, this leadership takes place at the intersection of customer delight, economic value creation (business value) and human design- and workspaces (Happy Workplace).



Source of human leadership

If we take into account the dynamic nature of the environment and the important element of continuous self-improvement, we can represent the Venn diagram as a Möbius circle (see figure below). Here, too, we find human leadership in the center of the circle.



Factors and dynamics of modern, human leadership

What does it mean to develop leadership in such a way that it no longer chases short-term goals and is externally driven, but follows a deeper meaning? That's what I talked about with Julia von Winterfeldt.

Meaningful leadership



Julia von Winterfeldt

Julia is the founder and CEO of SOULWORX, a purpose and strategy collective for leaders, teams and organizations. Julia's and SOULWORX's mission are to encourage leaders to show and live their authentic selves with the higher purpose of evolving the world of work to generate real value for people and organizations.

Purposeful Leadership

Thomas: What is purpose leadership?

Julia: Purpose leadership to me is the ability to follow the desires of your heart. It is leading something and attracting followers around something that is of significance or has meaningful direction. The followers are filled with what you feel needs to be implemented in this world. You are leading the way. And perhaps you inspire others to participate in that meaningful direction.

Thomas: Let's assume that I lead a team or a business unit, have worked for this company for 20 years and everything has worked out well so far. Does that mean that I have led in a purposeful way?

Julia: Well, I would add the notion of where this is leading. So, where are you leading? What's the reason you're moving yourself and others to do that? So, if you just say you led a team and did it in a great way, that wouldn't be enough for me. I want to understand what you - you and your team - are contributing to. What is the reason for the team to believe that they want to follow the leadership - what do they want to move towards?

Traditional versus modern leadership

Thomas: If a leader has always acted in a results-oriented way and actually kept his promises, i.e., been very successful and helped generate huge EBITs, for example, would you say that this traditional leadership model is outdated? If so, what has changed or what has not changed?

Julia: EBIT is not the reason to do something. It is the result of something. What I think has changed is that we recognize different dynamics, whether it's digitalization, interconnectivity, globalization, or climate change, that we need to be more engaged against - so how can we be involved in managing or solving those global dynamics? What has changed from my perspective is that leadership needs to be even more synchronized with a larger dynamic than just what is happening in an organization beyond EBIT or financial results.

Start with meaningful leadership

Thomas: Let's say I'm interested in purposeful leadership, although I'm skeptical, but I want to try it anyway. Where do I start?

Julia: With yourself. I would first want to understand why you are skeptical. Do you think that purposeful leadership is a message? Is purposeful leadership a thing to believe in? Yes.

So, if you are skeptical because you don't know what purposeful leadership is, the first question you might address is to understand why you are in the role you are in today. What drives you in this role?

For example, you might say, "I've been in the automotive business for 20 years now, so I'm good at it." Okay, that's great. Let's take it a step further: why did you stay there for 20 years?

"Because I know the industry pretty well." The next question might be, "Why did you stay in that industry for so long? You could explain that it's because you're good at it, or because you like the people, or because you've now reached a position where you have more power.

Then I could take this last point, that you now have more power, and ask what impact you actually have with that power. What can you accomplish in this place or in your position of power? If the answer is, "Well, we're making more money," or "I'm helping the company become bigger and more influential," I challenge you and ask who you're actually doing this for. If you state that this is essentially for the financial stakeholders, I will say that this is not sufficient for purposeful leadership.

I think it's time you leverage that position of power with more stakeholders. Figure out how to reach not only your financial stakeholders, but your real customers and potentially the community, meaning the employees and the community beyond, so maybe even the general public. What is it that you can contribute? Think about your role and the benefits of that role and how you can use that power in a positive way to have an even greater impact on what you do.

So it's not so much about power as such, but about influence and the meaning of what you do.

Thomas: Let's say I have found my meaning or my personal driver, but I can't change my role. How can I change my environment if I lead in a meaningful way? What impact can I or other people expect from this? How can they see if something is different?

Julia: Well, I assume that when you find your personal driver, you either talk about it more or want to live your life differently from now on.

Let's stay with the work environment. You start leading from your driver. You know what you really believe in, what you bring to the world.

The first thing you should change is the way you talk about yourself and the reason you are in that role.

The second thing is that you not only align the goals of your role with that meaning and purpose, but you also align the goals of the team. You're explaining why you're doing something and how you can make it happen, what goals you want to set for yourself to get to the bigger why or the higher purpose. That could be a second change in the work environment.

The third could be how you work based on the meaning you follow as an individual and then hopefully your team follows. Maybe then the values you have been following will change and align with the meaning.

I'll give you an example: the value of having more courage, the way you deal with that courage, becomes different. It has a different finality or meaning. So, the values themselves may not change as much as the way you act on them.

And last but not least, the way you actually produce the services or products may change.

So, it's not that once you find your purpose and personal driver, the next day it will be completely different. I think it just starts working in you. The first thing you'll see is in your communication: The way you relate to yourself, the way you describe yourself, will change. Because now you realize, "Wow, now I know why I'm here in this role, what and how I can contribute to this role. I'm going to talk about it differently than I've been living and fulfilling my role so far."

Find the personal driver

Thomas: A personal question: How did you find your sense or personal driver?

Julia: I actually joined the True Purpose Institute¹⁹⁶ in San Francisco and got coached on finding my purpose. It was an eight-month journey and I looked at myself from both an ego perspective and an intuitive perspective. I knew that if I had the answers from an ego perspective and then from an intuitive perspective, I could grasp what my purpose was in both my logical mind and my intuitive mind.

What you need to accomplish during this process is to undo all the conditioning, all the limiting beliefs that you have, or the fears that you have had to go through, this pain and shadow work. So, what's really inside you that you've been covering up or not wanting to look at or never noticing can come out and be expressed.

Guided tour for everyone

When I talk about leadership, it doesn't mean just one person leading a troop. Leadership is independent of role. It can be lived by any person. This is especially true for Agile and human leadership, where there is no strict and inflexible top-down hierarchical leadership. So, when we talk about "leadership mentality" and "leadership," we don't mean exclusively traditional leadership. Leadership can be practiced by a manager, a product owner, a team facilitator, or a team member. The scope and impact of leadership may differ, but the values and principles are the same.

That's why the more employees in an organization know what leadership in an Agile environment or Human Business is all about, the better it is for everyone involved - be it the employees, the company as such, or the customers. Every one of us can practice this kind of leadership.

Is an Agile company also a Human Business?

At this point, I would like to pose the Gretchen question of whether an Agile company is automatically also a Human Business and whether Agile leadership can be equated with human leadership. I would like to answer this question with “no”.

Agile, with its leadership and management approach, its mentality and its practices, breaks up the old, traditional corporate world, which is reaching its limits in the VUCA world. Agile thus brings more than just a breath of fresh air to a musty entity. Agile turns the “old” Tayloristic world on its head. Agile sends Taylor into a well-deserved retirement, so to speak. Although: If you take Taylor at his word, who wrote in 1911, “In the past, man has been first. In future, the system must be first.” Agile initiates a journey into the past¹⁹⁷, at the end of which people are once again at the center and are the drivers of entrepreneurial action.

The question is whether Agile will complete this journey.

I believe that Agile is still on the journey. The focus of Agile is no longer on the enterprise, but on customers, autonomous teams and team networks, and business value creation. Of course, people are everywhere in this. However, the question arises: What deeper meaning do Agile companies pursue?

The fact is that there are already many companies and organizations that have understood and internalized Agile and live it. Corporate giants such as Amazon, Apple or Google are often mentioned here. However, if you look at how cleverly these companies pull out of their social and societal responsibility by understanding how to avoid paying taxes, serious doubts arise as to whether such companies are really humane. The situation is similar when it comes to the working conditions of sales employees at Amazon, who are systematically exploited.¹⁹⁸ These organizations are poor examples of “happy workplaces”. So, it seems reasonable to assume that these companies use Agile more or primarily as effective tools to pursue traditional business goals. That is perfectly legitimate. Only, then it is not really an Agile or a human company.

A company that outwardly presents itself as Agile, preaches Agile and practices it in many areas, but does not internalize the motivation and vision of Agile, is not Agile, but practices a form of “fake Agile”. This is especially true if it falls back into old behavior patterns at the first challenge that change brings. Fake agility is thus an expression of fear of change, demonstrates a lack of realism, and shows a lack of courage and commitment to actively shaping the future.

In this respect, I personally believe that the journey that Agile has embarked on is not yet over and that change will continue. In this, Agile offers important values, helpful philosophies of leadership and management, and tools that are useful for the journey and thus the evolution to a Human Business and environment. In this respect, Agile is a door opener from traditional to Human Business. And it requires holistic and meaningful leadership to find this door and facilitate the opening process, thus supporting the fastest possible innovation process.¹⁹⁹

Figuratively speaking, this can be compared to the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Traditional companies, caterpillars, gorge themselves wherever and whenever they can. Fortunately, there is plenty of food and life is good. But, and this is critical, gorging and letting it go are not the caterpillar’s purpose - even though a caterpillar may think they are. Rather, the purpose is to store enough energy to transform into a butterfly.

Applied to companies, this means that the traditionally understood purpose of a company - profit maximization - may apply in the short term and certainly serves its purpose. Viewed as a whole, however, it is misleading. For it is neither holistic nor sustainable and only a preparation or intermediate step to the actual meaning and purpose of the company - namely service to people, by people.²⁰⁰

If the caterpillar pupates, it is not a simple further development of the living being. In the transformation, the caterpillar completely dissolves within the pupal case. It is a complete metamorphosis. Nothing remains as it was. Something new comes into being.

If we compare the transformation of the values and principles of traditional companies to Agile and then to Human Business values and principles, this also requires radical change. This change can only be planned to a limited extent in terms of its form. Instead, it requires a commitment to change and letting go of old patterns, values

and focal points. This in turn requires time and courage. It is an active acceptance and shaping of the transformation and thus a saying yes to the survival and life of the company. There is no way back to the past - i.e., from chrysalis to caterpillar - even if the transformation does not go smoothly. When a caterpillar decays in its cocoon and creates this chaotic stew, imaginal cells - latent cells of the future butterfly - become active. The old cells sense the presence of the new cell and begin to attack the new cell. But the imaginal cells emit a frequency. As a result, the imaginal cells find each other, group together, work together, and can multiply. Finally, they reach a turning point and the old cells of the caterpillar recede and dissolve.

The common frequency of the imaginal cell here are the Agile values and principles and those of Human Business. Because when enough people in a company work according to these values and principles, more and more find each other and work together. If enough employees work together like this, we can reach the tipping point where more of us want to move toward this butterfly world - toward Human Business. The hope is that we outsmart and overcome the old way of doing things.²⁰¹

With the hatching of the butterfly from the old pupa shell, the caterpillar achieves its actual purpose: namely, to be a butterfly. The transformation is complete and new perspectives arise. Of course, there are new dangers for the butterfly as well - but there is also a much larger world for it to explore.

The situation is similar for companies that are evolving from an Agile company into a Human Business. You no longer work for a company, but for people, be they customers, employees, or society.

In a Human Business, employees work for people, both inside and outside the company. It is holistic and meaningful work. This is a subtle but very significant difference from an Agile business. Agile companies have all the approaches to move in this direction. But an Agile company cannot become a Human Business until its values and principles align with those of a Human Business. Elements of a Human Business are already included in Agile values and principles. Agile values and principles can help create an environment in which human potential can flourish. They thus serve as a catalyst for a Human Business.

The various values and principles are summarized in the following figure²⁰²:

Metamorphosis from traditional to Human Business



	Traditional Business	Agile Transformation	Human Business
Objectives & Practices	Enterprise	Customer	Human
	Survival, relationship, self-esteem	Transformation, courage for development and growth	Internal cohesion, service, making a difference
	Developing and selling products and services, safety, financial stability, maximizing shareholder value, loyalty, efficient systems and processes, best practices; control, bureaucracy, manipulation, self-satisfaction, blaming	Delighting customers, continuous learning and self-improvement, accountability, alignment, empowerment, teamwork, results orientation.	Delighting customers, sustainable business balancing short, medium and long term results, building employee community, shared values and vision, integrity, openness, transparency, strategic partnerships, fulfillment for employees, mentoring, service to the common good, long term perspective, ethics, compassion, humility.
Values Focus			

Transformation from traditional business to Human Business (based on Barrett Seven Levels Model of Consciousness, <https://www.valuescentre.com/barrett-model>)

Important: We must not see this change as a linear process. Transformation results from learning and growth. When a company becomes more Agile, this does not mean that it throws all proven and still valuable practices overboard. The same applies to the transition from Agile transformation to a Human Business. What changes are the values and principles of the business and consequently the collaboration. Practices help to shape this transformation. We will take up this point in the following chapter.

The circumstances for this transformation, from traditional to Agile company and then to Human Business, are optimal in the digital age. All we have to do is allow change, actively promote it and shape it together. We cannot stop it if we want to survive. Denning explains:

“In the emerging Agile age, the dynamic is focused on human beings creating delight for other human beings. When an organization - or a society - is populated by people with this mindset, it can be at one with itself, at one with those for whom the work is being done, at one with those who are doing the work, and at one with the wider society in which it operates. In such a world, the meaning of “the dignity of man” – and women, too - is fresh and invigorating.”²⁰³

Agile is thus a door opener and catalyst for Human Business.²⁰⁴

Further ideas and exercises

- Analyze your own work environment with the help of Figure 38: Change from traditional to Human Business: What is the focus? What values are lived? What are the actual goals and what does the practice look like?
- Search for companies, organizations or even teams that are already living the hallmarks of a Human Business today.
 - What makes them so special?
 - Who or what contributed to them developing the way they did?
 - What can you take from this into your own work environment?
- Find out what your own values are by taking the free values assessment from the Barrett Values Centre, for example. The questionnaire takes five minutes to complete. The test is available in several languages: <https://www.valuescentre.com/tools-assessments/pva/>.

17. Human Business Design 101

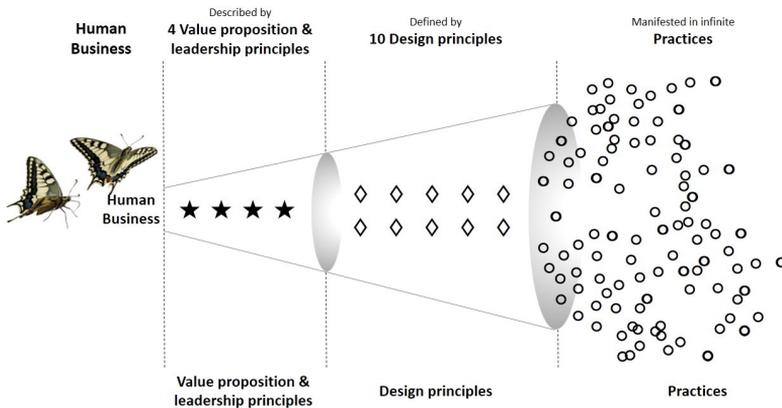
*“A gardener does not grow plants.
It creates an environment where plants can thrive.”*
Unknown

Key points

- The transformation to a Human Business is not a playground for mechanical business games. It would be just as misleading to believe that the development of a Human Business is linear.
- Transformation results from learning and growing. Practices guided by values and principles help shape this transformation.
- Values and principles form the basis of a Human Business. They enable an infinite number of practices.
- Unless the values and principles of Human Business are not internalized and lived, one or more Human Business practices by themselves do not constitute an authentic Human Business.
- Building a culture of change leading to the emergence of a Human Business starts with understanding the underlying values of the people involved. Values – conscious or unconscious – are the motivation for every decision or action taken.
- The concept of Human Business is designed to be suitable for established companies as well as for start-ups and new projects.
- There is no single way to transform a company into a Human Business – and it is certainly not possible to plan such a transformation on a white board.
- A top-down initiated change can only work if the entire environment understands the necessity and added value of this change and wants to implement it. In addition, the incentive systems for all employees must support this sustainably.
- One of the most effective and sustainable ways to initiate change is a jointly supported transformation in dialog and across old hierarchical boundaries.

Design Basics

When we talk about “Human Business design”, we must not make the following serious mistakes: Assuming that a Human Business can be planned on the drawing board and then implemented 1:1. The transformation to a Human Business is not a playground for mechanical business games. It would be just as misleading to believe that the development of a Human Business is linear. Nothing could be further from reality. Transformation results from learning and growing. When a company becomes Agile, it does not mean that it jettisons all proven practices that are still valuable. The same applies to the transition from an Agile company to a Human Business. What changes are the company’s values and principles, as well as how it works together. Practices help shape this transformation. The values and principles of Human Business enable an infinite number of practices. To single out a few would be unhelpful because each company, organization, or project has its own unique environment and circumstances and requires adapted practices. Graphically, we can illustrate the relationship between values and leadership principles, design principles and practices in Human Business as follows:



Value propositions and leadership principles, design principles and practices in Human Business.

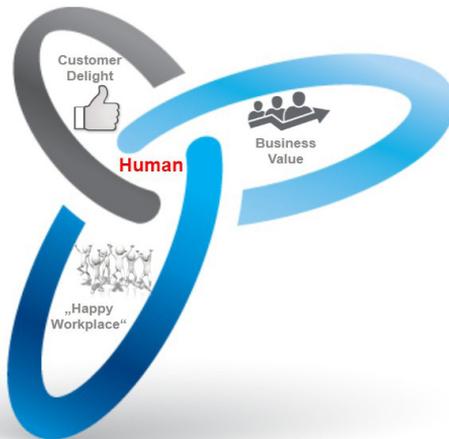
One or more practices in themselves, without internalizing and living the values and principles of Human Business, do not constitute authentic Human Business. The values and principles of Human Business form the foundation of Human Business. For the sake of simplicity, let's look at them again.

Value proposition/leadership principles of Human Business

1. We want to inspire our customers.
2. We trust, respect and care for our employees. We build human design- and work-spaces ("Happy Workplace").
3. We develop and secure sustainable business value.
4. We are constantly improving.

Each of these value propositions and leadership principles is valuable in its own right and can make a difference. But only when we realize all four can they work their full magic.

Graphically, we can represent the value propositions and leadership principles as follows:



The four value propositions and leadership principles of Human Business

People are at the center of the intersections of Customer Delight, Happy Workplace and Business Value. The dynamic, i.e., the fourth value proposition and leadership principle, is described here by the so-called Möbius circle.

At this point, we would also like to remind you of the “Ten Design Principles for a Human Business”, which you will find in chapter 2.

Recollection and focus on people

The Tayloristic worldview and management paradigm has banished people from business. To bring us humans back and thus give ourselves an orientation in the digital age, we have to focus on ourselves and on the employees in companies. If we can develop and evolve, and so can our employees, then so does the organization. For this reason, building a culture of change inside a Human Business starts with understanding the underlying values of the people involved. Values - conscious or unconscious - are the motivation for every decision made or action taken. Employees have their own values when they enter a company. They are influenced daily by the values they experience in their organization. To put the desired culture into action, it is important to understand and work on the current values.²⁰⁵

This is also the reason why, after introducing the concept of Human Business, we first looked at how we can rediscover ourselves as human beings, what makes us human and how we can shape our lives (Part 2). This is the basis for shaping our work (Part 3).

When we talk about Human Business design, there is a temptation to begin immediately with the presentation of methods and practices. This is legitimate. And yet such design will remain superficial unless we are aware of and understand its basis.

Impetus for established companies and organizations

The concept of Human Business is designed to be suitable for established companies as well as for start-ups and new projects. Let's first look at how we can trigger change in an established company or organization.

In the case of established companies, we can hardly expect a transformation from a traditionally oriented company to a Human Business within a very short time. This would certainly not be out of the question, but it is not realistic.

Admittedly, it would be ideal if we were to touch all the principles of Human Business at the same time and try to implement them holistically. That is possible. However, it is doubtful that culture, values and habits can be changed overnight. The resistance to such a change is likely to be simply too great. Apart from that, not everything that has proven itself in the past is automatically bad and must be thrown out of the window. And some or even many practices that the legislature prescribes have a *raison d'être* for good reason.

The four value propositions and leadership principles as well as the ten design principles of Human Business are each valuable in their own right, even if they have their greatest development and impact as a whole. The crucial question remains whether and to what extent a company wants to transform itself. If the focus is still exclusively on short-term profit and profit maximization, and if this defines the purpose of the company from the management's point of view, a transformation of the entire company to a Human Business, whether fast or slow, is rather unlikely, if not completely impossible. Overcoming such resistance requires enormous effort.

How do I convince others?

The situation is different if a company has already changed. These can be visible changes such as the establishment of self-organizing teams or the establishment or improvement of customer dialog. Or a company is concerned about how to retain talent or attract new talent and

is looking for new approaches because of it. Or a company observes that the competition has already changed or is getting stronger, and therefore it must either follow suit or look for new ways because established approaches do not offer answers or solutions to the new challenges.

If I want to initiate change, there are at least three entry points:

1. I drive change from the top down. This means that the leadership of a company actively demands change and drives it from the top down.
2. A change is taking place from the bottom up.
3. Change takes place in dialogue and collaboratively, that is, across old hierarchical boundaries.

The first option is particularly popular with traditional companies. Not because it is necessarily more effective, but because it corresponds to traditional hierarchical thinking. This doesn't have to be wrong at all. In fact, there are a number of companies, such as Salesforce, Barclays or Unilever, that have initiated sustainable Agile change in companies in this way. This has worked well because management has essentially understood and supported the Agile values and principles. And because the message from the top really got through to the lower levels and the traditional intermediate layers also a) understood the changes and b) wanted to support and implement them. It becomes difficult when the top management level announces and demands something new, the lower operational levels are convinced and enthusiastic, but the middle layers do not play along. This may be because they have not been picked up and do not see or do not want to understand the necessity and the added value of changes. It may be that the incentive systems, such as performance criteria for bonus payments, are still based on traditional values and principles and thus undermine or counteract the change that has been initiated.

Conversely, this means that top-down initiated change can only work if the entire environment understands the necessity and added value of this change and is willing to implement it, and if the incentive systems for all employees also support this in the long term. Otherwise, any new change quickly becomes the old familiar sow being herded through the village. It would be a fake.

Finally, the third entry option for initiating change, namely a jointly supported transformation in dialog and across old hierarchical boundaries, is among the most effective and sustainable. Nevertheless, this third entry opportunity can also arise as a follow-up phase from the first two entry opportunities. But here, too, anyone who believes that a transformation can proceed entirely without obstacles and resistance is in the wrong movie.

How do I overcome impediments and resistance?

Impediments and resistance on the way to Human Business are to be expected and the best way to overcome them is to convince with results. That means showing that the new way of working is not only more effective, more efficient, and more fun and enjoyable, but also delivers very good, if not better, results. That alone is still no guarantee that the change will be carried throughout the organization. But it is a start.

Another way to break down resistance to change is to share success stories of new ways of working. Be it your own success stories or those of other companies you observe. This, too, can be quite tedious, but it pays off if it can bring about a gradual change of mood.

Last, but not least, there is always the option of showing such employees, who refuse any change and want to cling to the old like a limpet, new opportunities outside the company and asking them to leave. For the affected employee, this may not sound fair or social. To the affected company and the employees who want to go along with the change, such an extreme move is very much social. One bad apple can spoil a whole basket of healthy apples. If you want to avoid this, you have to act.

How and where do I start?

There is no one and only way to turn a company into a Human Business. And it is certainly not possible to plan such a change in general terms. Maybe it would work for a machine, but not for a company with and for people. Such an approach would be more likely to alienate and disillusion employees. Ultimately, one would try to initiate and actively develop something new with old tools. Not only

would such an approach be ineffective, but it would also possibly be destructive and could even lead to old structures becoming entrenched instead of breaking them up and opening them up for something new.

It is more effective and, above all, easier to address the matter with the dialogue approach. Always assuming that one wants to explore in a company or in an organization whether, how, where and when one can make it or them more human. Without this intention, or at least an interest in exploring, it will be difficult to change anything at all, let alone identify starting points for change. It's not even so much about discovering and eradicating weak points. I think that "human elements" exist in every company and in every organization. These want to be identified and strengthened. So, the first step is to discover them.

Appreciative Inquiry

So how can you proceed in concrete terms? The Appreciative Inquiry approach²⁰⁶ has proven its worth, as it enables us to gain a good picture of the current situation of the company or organization in terms of the four principles of Human Business within a short period of time.

The Appreciative Inquiry questions on Human Business can be developed individually, online or in a workshop. In answering the questions, the focus is less on failure analysis. Rather, existing strengths and practices are identified and honored. The results of the analysis then serve as an entry point for deriving concrete improvement measures.

Organizing a workshop is most effective and sustainable in that a human space can open up and unfold through interaction. This can release creative energy, which in turn can be very helpful in shaping the company or organization. Let's look at what to consider in an Appreciative Inquiry workshop.

The participants in the workshop should represent a cross-section of the company or organization. Of course, the workshop can initially be conducted by the management level only. However, if the participants represent a cross-section of the company, this promises additional, valuable input. Apart from that, a company is not defined exclusively by the management level and its managers.

A large, seated room is recommended as the venue. Specifically, if there will be ten participants, for example, the room should have a capacity for at least 20, preferably 30 people. To record the workshop results, we need four metaplan walls. We also need enough Post-Its/sticky notes or moderation cards. Each metaplan wall stands for its own topic:

1. Customer delight
2. Human design- and workspace (“Happy Workplace”)
3. Business value
4. Continuous self-improvement

At the beginning, the group divides into four small groups of equal size, each of which goes to a meta-partition. On the walls, the small groups answer a series of questions on the respective topics. They record their answers either on moderation cards, which are attached to the metaplan wall with pins, or on sticky notes, which can then be stuck to the wall.

The individual questions are:

1. What do we mean by [metaplan wall topic]? (For example, for the topic wall “Customer delight”, the question is “What do we mean by customer enthusiasm?”)
2. What are the critical success factors for [metaplan wall topic]? In other words, what contributes to achieving [metaplan wall topic]?
3. How do we secure [metaplan wall topic]? Specifically, with which
 - a) products,
 - b) employees/people and
 - c) processes/workflows?
4. How do we measure [metaplan wall topic]?
5. What are we investing to achieve [metaplan wall topic]?
6. What value do we receive or hope to receive from our investment/outreach?

In answering the questions, the focus is on the current situation.

In order to gather as much input as possible for all four topics, the small groups move to the next wall after 15 to 20 minutes to answer the questions on the new topic. One member of each small group remains at the first wall to briefly present the previous results to the new group. After another 15 to 20 minutes, the small groups switch again. This change takes place a total of three times, so that each small group could give its input on each of the four topics.²⁰⁷

After the last iteration, the results are briefly presented in plenary by a representative of each group on the respective topic. This ensures that all participants are on the same level. At this point, it is interesting to ask which topic is most important to the participants. A short voting round can be inserted for this purpose. For example, participants are asked to give points for each topic. The topic that is most important gets four points, the second most important three points, the third most important two points, and fourth most important one point. The most important topic identified in this way can help in the subsequent prioritization of measures.

The small group work now goes into a second round. As in the first round, the group divides into four smaller groups. The small groups again go to one of the four metaplan walls. Unlike the first round of small group work, this time the focus of the work is no longer on the current situation. Rather, the question is asked:

1. What would we like to improve? What would be the or an ideal state?
2. What or who is preventing us from reaching an ideal state?

The answers to the questions from the first round can serve as orientation, but they do not have to. The answers to the new questions are also recorded on moderation cards or Post-It's on the respective walls. After 15 to 20 minutes, the small groups rotate, i.e., they move to the next topic wall, with one team member again stopping to present the previous results to the new group. Once all small groups have dealt with all four topics, the results are presented and discussed by one representative of each small group in the plenary session.

The results of each topic wall can later be recorded in a document or table. The following format could serve as an example:

	Customer delight	Happy workplace	Business value	Continuous self-improvement
What do we mean by ...?				
What are the critical success factors for ...?				
How do we ensure ...? Specifically, through which <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products, • Employees / people, • Processes / workflows? 				
How do we measure ...?				
What are we doing/investing in to achieve ...?				
What added value do we yield or hope to yield from ...?				
What is most important to us? What do we value most?				

Content structure for an Appreciative Inquiry workshop

Example

A few years ago, I studied the organizational performance of a plant run by a global automotive supplier. The goal was to find out why this particular plant performed exceptionally well. The workshop format was similar to the one just described. We asked the additional question of what other plants could learn from this plant.

The result of the workshop was, on the one hand, a list of best practice examples that could serve as a model for other plants. In addition, the participants developed their own concrete measures for securing and further improving their performance. There was no criticism of possible weaknesses. Weaknesses were very much identified, but there was no apportioning of blame, nor was there any search for excuses. A negative and tense atmosphere could not really arise. One honored one's own performance, celebrated it and took this energy with one to develop further measures for one's own plant and at the same time to consider how one could help other plants.

MVP Workshop

If you want to answer specific questions or search for specific solutions, an MVP workshop is a good idea. We already learned about the structure of such a workshop in Chapter 12.

One starts with the description and analysis of a problem or with a concrete question and thus works out the motivation for an action. In addition, an ideal state is described, the vision. Finally, one develops concrete measures or practices with the help of which one can approach the vision.

Example

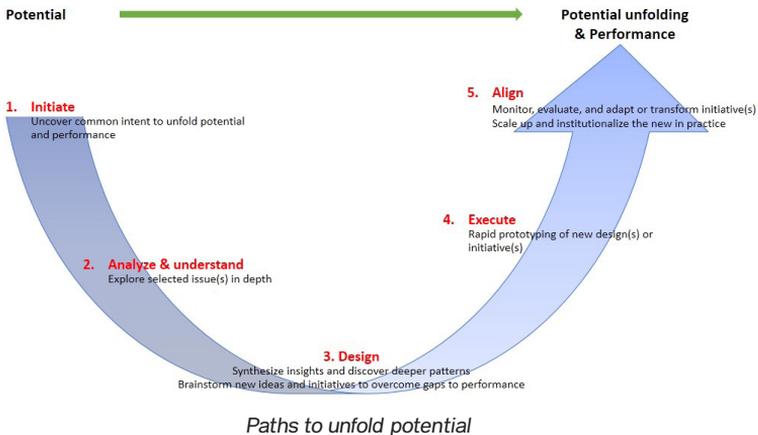
A few years ago, I facilitated a workshop in a company that wanted to find out how it could get a grip on its many overtime hours and thus contribute to a better work-life balance. The focus of the workshop was on developing human design and workspaces ("Happy Workplace"). As a result, the group had come up with three critical success factors for this design:

1. A common understanding of roles and responsibilities in the teams and how to support them
2. clear criteria for prioritizing work/activities
3. Open, transparent dialogue within the company instead of selective distribution of information from top to bottom along hierarchical levels

The group used these criteria to develop further concrete measures to reduce overtime in the company. The measures introduced contributed to the fact that the issue of overtime in the company was history just a few weeks later. In addition, the working atmosphere improved significantly, as could be seen in a later employee survey.

Steps to unfolding potential

Both approaches presented - Appreciative Inquiry and MVP Workshop - have in common that they promote a dialogue that helps to unleash creative energy and leads to concrete actions. Thus, change in a company or organization can take place in five steps:²⁰⁸



1. Initiate

The prerequisite for initiating or opening up to change is the recognition that it is time for change. Then there is the curiosity to look for something new, and finally the willingness to go down this path. The interest in discovering and developing one's own potential is the basis for initiating change.

2. Analyze and understand

It is not preconceived or entrenched opinions and approaches that are called for in the search for answers to questions or solutions to problems; rather, the open exchange of ideas, questions and approaches is the starting point, as well as the curious exploration of selected topics.

3. Design

New insights are summarized, connections are captured, and deeper patterns are discovered. Brainstorming new ideas and initiatives helps to close the discovered gaps for the development of potential and performance.

4. Try and implement

Especially when it comes to approaches that are not yet established, it is inevitable to try them out quickly and, if possible, playfully. Perfection is out of place here. Instead, mistakes help to learn faster and to get to the goal.

5. Customize

If initiatives and prototypes prove successful, they must be adapted so that they can be scaled and established. If they are not successful and must or can be further developed, the process starts all over again.²⁰⁹

Human Business design for start-ups and new projects

The approaches presented for triggering change in established companies and organizations are also suitable for start-ups or new projects. One of the biggest differences is that in most cases there is less internal resistance than in established environments. This facilitates a focus on the values and principles of Human Business from the very beginning and makes it easier to align and develop companies or organizations as Human Businesses from the ground up. The HIP Camp (see Chapter 12) was a good example of this.

It is also conceivable to gear startup incubators and accelerators to Human Business from the outset and thus set them apart from the competition. The same applies to the establishment of incubators and accelerators specifically for projects.

Project incubators and Human Business accelerators have an advantage: projects tend to have lower risks than startups. They have a shorter duration, are more suitable for experimental learning, and can achieve results quickly, i.e., iteratively and incrementally. Moreover, they can be built both within an existing organization or as a stand-alone hub.²¹⁰

18. Being Human in The Digital Age

*“If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.”*
African proverb

Key points

- The question of whether we are overwhelmed by the VUCA world or whether we let it overwhelm us is a question of perspective and attitude which we are fully in control of.
- The future is not a thing, but a doing.
- Digitization has helped us evolve from an industrial society to a knowledge and creative economy.
- The Agile approach can be a viable door opener to human creativity.
- When we combine fear of the unknown and curiosity about the new, it can be the basis for innovation.
- We have to understand life backwards. But we must live it forwards.
- The VUCA world is the new normal. It is a wake-up call to live and actively shape our lives.
- Being human gives us the answers to the questions that the VUCA world raises: living in the here-and-now and at the same time embracing innovation, change, and continuous transformation.
- The digital age is not primarily about technologies; it is about us people.
- It is us human beings who give ourselves the necessary orientation for shaping our present and future.
- Real progress, real life, can only be found in the interplay of inner and outer creative spaces, in joint cooperation and dialogue. It is about the art of the middle path.
- Only when we learn and understand to be human, to feel, love, accept and accept ourselves, can we truly love others. Not before.

VUCA is the new normal

At the beginning of the book, I explained why and how the VUCA world is overwhelming many people and companies. The ever-faster pace of change is simply too much for them. Old and proven approaches and beliefs no longer work. Yet today we are only seeing the beginning of the VUCA world. The volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity or ambivalence will increase rather than decrease. An end to the development does not seem to be in sight.

This raises two mundane questions:

1. Do we duck away and try to turn back the wheel of development - back to a world we could still grasp and control?
2. Do we want to welcome the VUCA world with open arms and make the best of it for ourselves?

This book makes a clear case for the second. There is no way back. Mankind and nature have always been constantly changing and evolving. Why should it be any different now? If change is natural and we are looking for ways to be more human or human again in this day and age, it means at the same time that we must welcome the change around us. After all, we are not only a part of our environment, but we actively shape it.

In this respect, the question of whether we are overwhelmed by the VUCA world or we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by it is also a question of perspective and attitude - but we have control over this. So why hesitate?

Welcome to the future

We should not just leave it at a possibly necessary change in our perspective or attitude. They alone cannot really achieve much. They only come alive when we do something with them when we act and shape accordingly. The Norwegian futurologist Indset (2019) writes in this regard:

*"We must accept that the world is ... strange and unpredictable, which at the same time provides scope for creativity and unpredictable leaps in development. The future is indeterminate, it is what we create out of the past and present. It is not a thing, but a doing: it comes into being by our 'futuring' it."*²¹¹

If we try to idealize the past and turn back the wheel of time, we move away from our creativity. Instead of being more human, we negate an essential characteristic of being human: creativity. By ducking away from digitalization, we are not stopping development. The distance between us and what is developing “out there” is only getting bigger and bigger. So, we would not only try in vain to live in the past, we would also lose the sense and the connection to the present. In my opinion, not a rosy outlook.

Creative economy

There are people who see the digital age primarily as an age of technology and machines. This is understandable, especially since technology and machines have become more and more a part of our everyday lives and will possibly occupy an even larger space in the future. To limit the digital age to technologies and machines is too one-sided and restrictive.

Thanks to digitization, the importance of knowledge is increasing all the time. We no longer live in a purely industrial society but are in transition to the so-called knowledge economy. With the knowledge economy, we are creating new spaces for our creativity. This is why we sometimes refer not only to the knowledge economy, but also to the creative economy or creative industries.²¹²

“The Creative Economy is the economy comprising organizations that keep generating new products and services by continuously adding value and delighting their customers. It may be contrasted with the Traditional Economy - the economy that comprises organizations operating on principles of hierarchical bureaucracy and, in the case of public companies, usually focused on maximizing shareholder value as reflected in the current share price.”²¹³

Not preserving, but shaping

The Agile approach, which we highlighted in Chapter 15, plays a crucial role in the creative industries. However, in my opinion, it would be presumptuous to elevate it to the status of a religion. It stands in contrast to bureaucracy, which wants to preserve the old, the tried, and the true. Agile is made for change and transformation. The Agile approach is a door opener and catalyst of human creativity and Human Business. Ultimately, we have to walk through that door ourselves and shape our environment into the way we want it to be.

Innovate or die

The fear of change

What we find behind the door that opens agility is not always known. In a sense, we have to take the plunge into cold and dark water. If we consider that we humans, as creative as we are, are at the same time afraid of the new, it is not so tempting after all. But do we have an alternative? Not really.

It is an obvious contradiction of nature: on the one hand, we are curious and creative. On the other hand, we are hesitant to try new things, looking for safety and security. This is a “freak of nature”, so to speak. But there is also magic hidden in this mood. It only becomes apparent when we take the famous plunge into the deep end. When fear of the unknown and curiosity for the new are combined, this is the basis for innovation.

Innovations do not develop in or are inspired by familiar spaces. It is new ideas, inspirations, environments and circumstances that move us to develop innovations. Conversely, this means that blocking attitudes toward the new nip innovations in the bud. And it's not just innovations that are stifled. Ultimately, we do the most harm to ourselves. In this respect, the saying “innovate or die” hits the mark. And that applies not only to companies, but also and especially to us humans.²¹⁴

Blocking change is anything but shaping the present or the future. The blockade attitude is a sign of being trapped in the past and lacking a sense of reality. We then live in memories and thoughts that have long since passed.

Do not become a victim

It can be no less dangerous if we observe the change around us and then content ourselves with reacting to it. Of course, this is legitimate. But this has nothing to do with shaping our own environment. If we concentrate on reacting, perhaps even becoming really good at it, we are ultimately only lagging behind the development. We adapt to new environments openly and quickly. We learn and become smarter. Ultimately, however, we become “victims” of developments that others have designed. This can go well for a while, but there is no real guarantee.

What does it mean to embrace change?

Embracing change is more than just observing it and much more than just reacting to it. Embracing change begins with awareness and perception of the present and the change around us. This is the basis for the personal decision to embrace change and be ready to shape it on our own. Or to continue to merely observe change and, where possible, respond to it. Both are legitimate choices. The art is to notice and experience when the opportunity to shape arises. When I am open to change in my mind and heart, I open up a design space for myself. How I design depends on the situation. It may be that I can master the new challenges with conventional means. But I must not just rely on that. It is doubtful, for example, whether the German or other Western education systems, which often have roots in the 19th century and teach 20th century tools, are still capable of setting the right course for the 21st century.

End of tradition

All honor to tradition. But tradition alone is no substitute for innovation. Unless we are talking about the tradition of constantly reinventing oneself, of being curious, of being prepared to discover new things, to abandon the old if necessary and to actively shape it. Such a tradition is very much fit for the future.

Tradition can have a great added value for shaping our future. It helps to both better understand and appreciate the past.

“As Søren Kierkegaard aptly put it, ‘It is true what philosophy says that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other sentence, that one has to live forward.’”²¹⁶

Arrive in today

Let’s be honest, the “good old days,” whatever they may have been, are over. And they are not coming back. The VUCA world is the new normal. We can resist it and try to deny it. But we won’t change anything. But the VUCA world is not a horror scenario, but a wake-up call to live

and to actively shape our lives. For this, however, we need to know who we really are, namely human beings and not functioning resources. And we need to know how we want to live. Being human is not something passive, but active. Being human means living in the here-and-now, and at the same time always innovation, change, continuous transformation and further development. These are exactly the answers to the questions raised by the VUCA world. No one forces us to learn and innovate; just as little as to survive. Only, without the will to innovate, there is no long-term survival either.



We need to ask the right questions

So, let's leave behind the question of what the future may look like. Let's ask ourselves the question: How do we want to live? We - that is not companies, organizations, bureaucracies, roles, technologies or machines. We - that is us as people.

The digital age is not primarily about technology, but about us as people. "The promise of digital technology is to make our lives better. But what does better mean? ... Technology must be geared to the actual needs of people."²¹⁷

So, let's not ask questions of technology for technology, but questions of technology for us humans. For example:

- How can I make the digital transformation sustainable for me as a person, for my customers, for my employees, for my company?
- How can I use digitization for more humanity, for more humanity in life?
- Why and how does digitalization represent a unique opportunity for more humanity, and why and how does it benefit not only companies and the economy, but also society and each individual?

A change of perspective, such as reformulating the question of what the future may look like for us into the opening question of how we want to live, is not a patent remedy for solving the problems of our time. The change of perspective is a first brush stroke on a big, white canvas that we call life and that wants to be designed. By us. That is a great art. And it cannot be planned or predicted. But it requires that we use the many tools we already have today and try our hand as artists.

VUCA redefined

VUCA does not always have to be a synonym for the uncontrollable change of our time. VUCA can also be interpreted in a completely different way and can become a survival strategy. Let's simply change the meaning of the letters VUCA.²¹⁸To switch

- from Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambivalence.
- to Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility.

In detail, the terms mean:

Vision: If you have the feeling that everything is changing, then you need one thing: a clear vision to guide you. So, define a vision and keep it in mind for yourself and other project participants.

Understanding: In order to make decisions, information is necessary. Therefore, ensure knowledge transfer between all stakeholders.

Clarity: Give clear direction and try to make processes as simple as possible.

Agility: Ensure collaboration and communication between all project participants. The best way to do this is to work in an Agile way and, for example, exchange ideas every morning in the daily team meeting.

The middle way

Far be it from me to see only the positive things about the digital age and to find only words of praise for it. Of course, I see the risks and real dangers that come with digitization. But where there are risks, there are also opportunities. These must be sought and exploited. Risks must not be ignored. We must discover them, recognize them and do everything we can to minimize them. Design means being aware of both risks and opportunities and taking them into account accordingly. Those who only see risks are just as blind as those who wear rose-colored glasses and only see opportunities.

Take networking: people and economic structures are more networked today than ever before. Networking is a good thing; it helps to connect us humans and to engage in exchange. Technology can help with this. It is not and can never be a true substitute for a physical gathering of people. Being online can be great. But it is not a true alternative to face-to-face experiences. Conversely, it would be too short-sighted to demonize being online. Anyone who either demonizes or idolizes one or the other in its extremes fails to recognize the versatility of reality.

*“He who chooses the Middle Way does not believe precisely that the truth ‘lies somewhere in the middle,’ as the saying goes, as a diffuse compromise between the extremes. Rather, he recognizes that both extreme positions are wrong and that one comes closer to the truth by combining the seemingly irreconcilable positions.”*²¹⁹

This is how we must also understand the shaping of life and work. They are not to be seen as two separate parts of our existence but form a whole. It is important and valuable to become aware of one’s personal life design and to fill it out. It is just as important to carry these insights into the outer world and to discover the outer creative and design spaces for business and work and to shape them together with others. The connecting element between inner and outer creative and design spaces is us humans. Nothing more and nothing less. Thus, it is we humans ourselves who can give ourselves the necessary orientation for shaping our present and future.

The future is female

Our own humanity is the compass we need for the journey in the digital age. This is less about displaying daring and heroism. It's even less about emphasizing masculine bravery, strength and endurance as opposed to feminine qualities. Those who believe this will not get very far on the journey and will perish.

“Even Mahatma Gandhi stated, ‘To call woman the weaker sex is a slander; it is man’s injustice to woman.’ If by strength is understood brute strength, then woman is indeed less brute than man. If by strength is understood moral force, then the woman is immeasurably superior. Does she not have greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, does she not have greater endurance and greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman.’

*In his book *Unleash the Power of the Female Brain*,²²⁰ American psychiatrist and celebrity physician Daniel Amen explains the ways in which women are neurologically better wired for the demands of today’s world. Amen lists five strengths of women that make them uniquely qualified as leaders: empathy, collaboration, intuition, self-control and accountability.”²²¹*

The feminine is by nature connecting, unrestricted and open. Accordingly, the only conclusion that remains is that the future must be female. But is that really so?

Understanding the remarks of Gandhi, Amen and Indset to conclude that the economy and society must become more feminine or that the future is female can quickly be misunderstood because many of us always think in terms of black and white and men vs. women. After all, if the future were female, what would that mean for men, for example? Would they be the big losers? No. Because the statement “the future is female” merely points to the special characteristics of female leaders that we can use more than ever in the VUCA world.

Since the industrial revolution at the latest, we as individuals, as companies and as a society have been geared to “higher, faster, further!” We hardly notice anymore that the underlying beliefs are those that push us to our limits. What we need now is time to pause and reflect; not so much one extreme or the other, but to connecting and become more open. These are, however, female values. In this respect, the statement “The future is female” is quite true; but only if we all, men and women, shape the future together. In this respect, we must not misunderstand the statement “The future is female,” provocative as it is, as exclusionary.²²² Perhaps it would be better to phrase it: The future is human.

The future is human

A universal symbol for human life is yin and yang, the sign of the harmony of female and male energy. There are times for the yang, the male energy; times to become active and move forward. There are other times for the yin, the female energy; times to let others take the initiative, to gather information, and to listen for signals. It is the art of consciously letting things happen, of a purposeful readiness to receive, while calmly allowing the course of events to proceed, ready to accept what shows itself to you. Real progress, real life only exists in the interplay of yin and yang, in cooperation, in dialogue. This is reminiscent of the art of the middle path and is a call to humanity, which connects and unites the female and male energy and their forces.

Shapiro (2019)²²³ lists a number of skills we need to actively create in the digital age:

- Compassion
- Willingness to cooperate
- Curiosity
- Networking
- Determination
- Decisiveness
- Courage
- Engagement

There is no trace of passivity, nor of hectic actionism. Finding the middle way - that is the art. Each of us has the talent for this art. We just have to use it and live it.

Leadership for tomorrow

Again and again in this book, I have asked the question of where we could best begin to implement it. In most cases, the answer was the same: with us. Change does not require a decision made by some person at the very top of an organization's hierarchy and then carried down. Leadership has nothing to do with a role or a level of hierarchy. Leadership can and should be practiced by anyone and everyone who wants to shape their own future. Perhaps it is therefore more appropriate to speak of "responsibility" instead of "leadership".

If there is a sudden drop in pressure in an airplane and the oxygen masks fall from the ceiling, we always have to take care of ourselves first. This is true even if our own small child or another person in need of help is sitting next to us. It may be well-intentioned to want to help the other person first. But it doesn't really do much good if we forget to help ourselves when we run out of air and die.

The Christian commandment to love our neighbor says that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. The Golden Rule calls us to treat the neighbor and the planet as we would like to be treated ourselves. Both maxims mean nothing more than that we must first start with ourselves to know, acknowledge, help and love before we can share our love, help and support with someone else. "This is not selfishness, but an expression of self-compassion."²⁴

Only when we learn and understand what it is to be human, to feel, love, accept and accept ourselves, can we truly love others. Not before. That's why tomorrow's leadership requires us to be authentic and act accordingly.

This means nothing other than that the adventure of being human in the digital age begins with ourselves. If we want to sail off, we must realize that we are the skipper on our own boat. We need to detach ourselves from others and, if necessary, tear ourselves away to sail off. This is not self-centered. It is personal responsibility. We must realize that we ourselves are in control of the helm. This requires that we know where we want to sail. The temptation to let others take the helm and swim along is great. But in doing so, we also give up our own opportunities to shape the course. We may then be sailing in the wrong direction.

The compass we need for navigation is found within us. As shown in Part 2 of the book, the compass is our humanity with its energy and its immeasurable potentials. All we have to do is learn to access it. In doing so, we can use all the skills we have learned. We are not alone in this. Because on the one hand we have our self and our abilities. And on the other hand, we need to be aware that we are then also making and shaping the journey with our fellow human beings. Dirk Gemein, happiness coach and meditation teacher, says: "I can only be human if I am at least two."

Ownership of shaping change in the digital age does not exclude others. The opposite is the case. Being human does not mean "me, me, me." Life is a dance - it requires at least two dancers. First, it's you and your life. You can enjoy the dance of your life, create it and live it. It is even more fun and joyful if you invite other people to dance with you. Or vice versa, let yourself be invited to dance with others. It is a change from 'me' to 'we'.

If we want to bring more humanity into our lives and our environment, we have to start with and within ourselves - out of self-love and personal responsibility. As a role model, we inspire imitators or attract such. Or we find role models and examples that we can follow and that can support us. Let's remember again Sivers, who in his 2010 TED talk stated, "If you really want to start a movement, have the courage to follow and show others how to follow. And if you find a lone crazy person doing something great, have the courage to be the first to stand up and join in."²²⁵

Individual creativity is great, opens up creative spaces and invites us to enter them. If we do this together with others, either by inspiring them or by being inspired, we increase our creativity exponentially. Because joint creativity is much more than the sum of the creative power of individuals. Individual creativity becomes collective creativity.



Is it possible to be human in the digital age?

Finally, let's come back to one of the central questions of the book: If we consider all the points we have addressed in the book, is being human possible in the digital age? And can Human Business contribute to this? My answers are:

- Yes, of course!
- Yes, what else!?
- Yes, right now!
- Yes, finally!

ENDNOTES

¹ The online dialog series was called “Love, Life and Work in a Human World”. The aim was to exchange views on the problems, questions and ideas brought to light by the Corona crisis and to develop concrete recommendations for action. A series of the dialogues is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTQA-Hx8AvLJrKolOZ3avchw/videos>.

² In the case of personal designations and personal nouns in this book, an attempt is made to use both the feminine and the masculine form in equal proportions. Corresponding terms apply in principle to all genders for the purposes of equal treatment. Any abbreviated form of language is for editorial reasons only and does not imply any valuation.

³ Precht, Richard David. 2018. *Jäger, Hirten, Kritiker: Eine Utopie Für Die Digitale Gesellschaft*. München: Wilhelm Goldman Verlag.

⁴ Own translation of Indset, A. (2019, 191). *Quantenwirtschaft: Was kommt nach der Digitalisierung?* Econ. See also Indset, A. (2020) *The Quantum Economy - Saving the Mensch with Humanistic Capitalism*. Berlin: Econ.

⁵ Marc Elsberg describes exactly such a scenario in his novel “*BLACK-OUT - Morgen ist es zu spät*” (Blanvalet, 2013)

⁶ In his book *Homo Deus: A History of Tomorrow* (2017), Harari warns against a techno-humanism in which algorithms gain more and more power and humans ultimately fall by the wayside.

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biotechnology>

⁸ Own translation from <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biotechnologie>

⁹ Own translation from <https://www.planet-wissen.de/natur/forschung/nanotechnologie/index.html>

¹⁰ Own translation from <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentechnik>

¹¹ See also Bill Gates’ (2019) comments in an interview with the German newspaper *Die Welt* in which he promotes genetic engineering.

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¹³ Shapiro (2019, 77)

¹⁴ Tapscott, D. und A. Tapscott (2016). *Blockchain Revolution: How the Technology Behind Bitcoin Is Changing Money, Business and the World*. Penguin Random House UK.

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¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_engineering

¹⁷ Own translation of Precht, R. D. (2018, 95). *Jäger, Hirten, Kritiker: Eine Utopie für die digitale Gesellschaft*. Wilhelm Goldman Publishers.

¹⁸ Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Harper & Brothers.

¹⁹ “Taylorism is the term used to describe the principle of process control of work sequences founded by the U.S. American Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915), which are prescribed in detail by a management based on work studies and work preparation, and for which the term Scientific Management was coined. [...] With the decline of mass production and the increasing difficulty of pre-planning flexible manufacturing processes in detail, the importance of Taylorism is declining in many industrial sectors, while numerous service activities, for example in call centers, banks, system catering or care professions, are increasingly structured through in a Taylorist manner and made more flexible, with a reduction of room for maneuver and the use of new forms of control.” – Own translation of <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taylorismus>

²⁰ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/7/17832024/obama-speech-trump-illinois-transcript>

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volatility,_uncertainty,_complexity_and_ambiguity

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynefin_framework

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²⁴ Volini, E. et al. (2019). *From employee experience to human experience: Putting meaning back into work*. 2019 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends. *Deloitte Insights*.

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²⁶ Steve Denning addresses this phenomenon in his book *The Age of Agile: How Smart Companies Are Transforming the Way Work Gets Done* (2018) and many of his Forbes articles (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/steve-denning/#4953552b1b2d>).

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³² <https://hbr.org/1990/05/ceo-incentives-its-not-how-much-you-pay-but-how>

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³⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mariana_Mazzucato

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³⁷ See, for example, <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/usa-abschied-vom-shareholder-value-was-steckt-hinter-dem-vorstoss-a-1282746.html> or <https://www.manager-magazin.de/unternehmen/artikel/business-roundtable-us-ceos-bekennen-sich-zu-stakeholder-value-a-1282762.html>.

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¹¹⁶ Own translation of Horx, M. *Die Zukunft nach Corona. Wie eine Krise die Gesellschaft, unser Denken und unser Handeln verändert*. Econ, 2020

¹¹⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/larsamend/?hl=en>

¹¹⁸ This methodical approach is called “Appreciative Inquiry”.

¹¹⁹ For more information on Dirk Gemein, visit www.dirkgemein.de.

¹²⁰ “Since the end of the 19th century, tango has spread in various forms from Buenos Aires throughout the world. To distinguish it from the standard tango of the World Dance Program (occasionally called European tango), the more original (less regimented) form of the dance and its associated music is called ‘Tango Argentino’ worldwide. Tango has been included in UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since September 2009.” Own translation of https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tango_Argentino

¹²¹ For those who think that it looks strange when men dance with men, the following video is recommended: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1WPhqWhewj/?igshid=ewo5oxuhtw4x>

¹²² <http://motivate2b.com/tango-flow-life/> on 12/25/2016.

¹²³ Berger, W. (2014). *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas*. Bloomsbury. Berger, W. (2014). *The art of asking smart questions*. Piper.

¹²⁴ Senge, Peter M. 1990. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Currency Doubleday.

¹²⁵ <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sputnikschock>.

¹²⁶ Peter S. and M. Matarelli (2019) describe in their book *Personal Agility: Double Your Impact. Perform With Precision* (Saat Network, available online at: <https://saat-network.ch/pbk>) how to make this practice concrete.

¹²⁷ In the following, I assume that you can or want to set up a project yourself. Even if this is not the case, i.e., if you are working in a project without having had any influence on the direction of the project in advance, the explanations in this section of the chapter apply.

¹²⁸ In my interview with Richard Sheridan, CEO of Menlo Innovations (see Chapter 3), he explains how important these questions are in understanding real customer needs.

¹²⁹ The SMARTER concept is discussed in Hyatt, M. (2018). *Your Best Year Ever*. Baker Books, available online at: <https://bestyearever.me>.

¹³⁰ See also Lipton, B. H. (2016). *Intelligent cells - How experiences control our genes*. Koha.

¹³¹ I go into more detail in my book *Leadership Principles for Project Success* (2011).

¹³² “Wow Projects: projects that add value, projects that matter, projects that make a difference, projects that leave a legacy ...”. Zitat aus Peters, Th. J. (2007) “The Wow Project.” *FastCompany*, 2007, <http://www.fast-company.com/magazine/24/wowproj.html>.

¹³³ This is the basic idea of the Kaizen philosophy.

¹³⁴ The title of my presentation was “The Power and Illusion of Self-Organizing Teams”. (2012). *2012 PMI Global Congress Proceedings*. Project Management Institute.

¹³⁵ <https://www.afest.com/>

¹³⁶ <https://summit.co>

¹³⁷ <https://www.happystartupsummer.camp>

¹³⁸ <http://www.alptitu.de>

¹³⁹ <https://beingexponentiallyhuman.com>

¹⁴⁰ A video summary of the seminar is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IHmRVMQCJ4>. The final report in German Clemens, T. et al. (2015). *Social Entrepreneurship: Let Happiness Happen*. Berlin is available online at <http://motivate2b.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/SocialEntrepreneurship.Let-Happiness-Happen-2014.pdf>.

¹⁴¹ See the discussion of social business as an example of Human Business in Chapter 3.

¹⁴² Former HIP Camp websites: <https://hipcamphd.wixsite.com/hip-camphd> and <https://www.facebook.com/HIPCampHD/>.

¹⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology

¹⁴⁴ Osterwalder, A. and Pigneur, Y. (2010). *Business model generation*. John Wiley & Sons.

¹⁴⁵ Juli, T. (2011). *Leadership Principles for Project Success*. CRC Press.

¹⁴⁶ We discuss the different levels of listening in Chapter 13.

¹⁴⁷ Since the original HIP camp Motivate2B has modified the setup and integrated it into its work; visit <https://motivate2b.com/academy-human-business/> for additional information

¹⁴⁸ Scharmer, C. O. (2009). *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*. Berrett-Koehler.

¹⁴⁹ Scharmer (2009) refers to this moment or state, in which I am in the here-and-now, perceive the whole and am open to new things, as “presencing”. It is a neologism made up of “present” and “sensing”.

¹⁵⁰ Schein, E. H. (1985). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

¹⁵¹ This is one of the central demands of the global “Fridays for Future” movement: not to talk about climate change and hope that we will get a grip on it, but to act now.

¹⁵² Polman, K. und Vasconcellos-Sharpe, S. (2017, 84-87). *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation*. Reboot the Future.

¹⁵³ Polman, K., & Vasconcellos-Sharpe, S. (2017). *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation*. London: Reboot the Future

¹⁵⁴ *Reboot the Future* has two major goals:

(1) Building a social movement of young people and redefining the way they think and feel about each other and the world.

(2) Building a network of prominent leaders who are committed to making tangible change, informed by the Golden Rule.

For more information visit <https://www.rebootthefuture.org>

¹⁵⁵ Friedman, T. L. (2015). *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*. Picador.

¹⁵⁶ Sisodia, R. and Gelb, M. J. (2019). *The Healing Organization: Awakening the Conscience of Business to Help Save the World*. Nashville, TN: Harper Collins Leadership.

¹⁵⁷ Frankl, V. E. (2020 [1946]) *Yes to life in spite of everything*. Boston: Beacon Press.

¹⁵⁸ Armstrong, K. (2011). *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. Anchor Books.

¹⁵⁹ Sisodia, R. and Gelb, M. J. (2019). *The Healing Organization: Awakening the Conscience of Business to Help Save the World*. Nashville, TN: Harper Collins Leadership.

¹⁶⁰ See also Valeros, Rodriguez and Perlas use the image of the metamorphosis in describing societal change. See, for example: Valeros, M. E. E. (2011) *The Dynamics of Imaginals*, *PhilStar Global*. Available at: <https://www.philstar.com/cebu-lifestyle/2011/11/09/745905/dynamics-imaginals> (Accessed: 7 August 2021). Rodriguez, A. (2018) *Crystallizing a human network for change*. *Transformation can be drastic*, *Wall Street International*. Available at: <https://wsimag.com/culture/43330-crystallizing-a-human-network-for-change> (Accessed: 7 August 2021). Rodriguez, A. (2019) *Metamorphosis Crystallizing a human network for change*, *Wall Street International*. Available at: <https://wsimag.com/wellness/53235-metamorphosis> (Accessed: 7 August 2021).

¹⁶¹ Harter, J. und Pendell, R. (2019). *10 Gallup Reports to Share With Your Leaders in 2019*. Gallup (2018). *Tomorrow's world of work*. Trust. Gallup (2017). *State of the Global Workplace*. O'Boyle, E. and Harter, J. (2018). *39 Organizations Create Exceptional Workplaces*. 26. November 2019 Deloitte (2018). *2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey. Millennials disappointed in business, unprepared for Industry 4.0*. Volini, E. et al. (2019). *From employee experience to human experience: Putting meaning back into work*. *2019 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends. Deloitte Insights*. Deloitte University EMEA (2018). *European Workforce Survey: Voice of the workforce in Europe. Understanding the expectations of the labour force to keep abreast of demographic and technological change*. Hagel, J. et al. (2016). *2016 Shift Index: The paradox of flows: Can hope flow from fear?*

¹⁶² Gallup (2017). *State of the Global Workplace*.

¹⁶³ Germany, for example, is no exception. While productivity and creativity are higher compared to other countries around the world, the proportion of disengaged employees averages a full 85% (70% disengaged, 15% actively disengaged).

¹⁶⁴ These include the so-called Millennials, who were born between 1983 and 1994, and the so-called Generation Z from the 1995 to 1999 cohorts.

¹⁶⁵ Deloitte Global (2018). *2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey. Millennials disappointed in business, unprepared for Industry 4.0*.

¹⁶⁶ Polman, P. (2017, 104). "If We Want To Go Far". In K. Polman und S. Vasconcellos-Sharpe (Hrsg.), *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation* S. 100-105). Reboot the Future.

¹⁶⁷ Gallup (2018, 8). *Tomorrow's world of work*. Trust available online at: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/246110/future-work-trust-down-load-deutsch.aspx>.

¹⁶⁸ See <https://unsdg.un.org> for examples.

¹⁶⁹ The founder of the "WE" movement, Craig Kielburger, writes, "By encouraging young people to take on big issues as a group, service learning turns 'how can I make a difference' into 'how can we make a difference?'. And in changing one word, everything changes." Kielburger, C. (2017, 115). *Young at Heart*. In K. Polman & S. Vasconcellos-Sharpe (Eds.), *Imaginal Cells: Visions of transformation* (pp. 110-115). London: Reboot the Future.

¹⁷⁰ In this book, I capitalize “Agile” whenever I reference the Agile concept as a whole.

¹⁷¹ Denning, S. (2016, September 8). “Explaining Agile.” *Forbes*, available online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2016/09/08/explaining-Agile/#41434799301b>.

¹⁷² <http://Agilemanifesto.org/history.html>

¹⁷³ <http://agilemanifesto.org>. Own paraphrasing in [...].

¹⁷⁴ In addition to the four Agile values, twelve principles have also been compiled to help put the Agile values into action. These are as follows (<http://agilemanifesto.org/principles.html>):

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer’s competitive advantage.
3. Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
4. Businesspeople and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
5. Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need and trust them to get the job done.
6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
7. Working software is the primary measure of progress.
8. Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
10. Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential.
11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

¹⁷⁵ The same applies to Agile principles and practices. They are not only suitable for software and have been further developed there but can be found in many industries. In other words, the Agile values, principles, and practices are industry agnostic and universally applicable wherever you want to find new and better ways to improve offerings or practices for the benefit of customers or end users.

¹⁷⁶ Denning, S. (2010). *The Leader’s Guide to Radical Management: Re-inventing the Workplace for the 21st Century*. Jossey-Bass.

Denning, S. (2018). *The Age of Agile: How Smart Companies Are Transforming the Way Work Gets Done*. American Management Association.

¹⁷⁷ Sinek, S. (2009). *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Portfolio/Penguin.

¹⁷⁸ The optimal size of a small Agile team has emerged over many years and across industries. This does not mean that Agile work can only be done in small teams. An optimal team size does not mean that this size is fixed and inflexible. Rather, it indicates the group size for which experience has shown that teamwork is most suitable. If the group size is smaller or larger, it can work, provided there are clear roles and responsibilities as well as rules of collaboration.

¹⁷⁹ At the beginning of each iteration, the team and the product owner jointly review the scope for the upcoming iteration. When both have developed a deeper understanding of the requirements, the team estimates the effort and plans the next iteration. During the current iteration, the scope of the iteration cannot change. That is, the team freezes the planned scope. Possible change requests from outside the team or new customer requirements are accepted by the product owner and prioritized in the product backlog for future iterations. At the end of the iteration, the team then delivers the planned and promised partial deliverable to the product owner as a representative of the customer(s). The cycle then begins anew.

¹⁸⁰ Based on Ahmed Sidky, founder of the Business Agility Institute, illustrated in Denning, S. (2019). "Understanding the Agile Mindset". *Forbes*, online available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2019/08/13/understanding-the-Agile-mindset/#6cbe8c065c17>; also presented in Denning, S. et al. (2015). *The Learning Consortium for the Creative Economy: 2015 Report*. Available online at: <https://motivate2b.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Learning-Consortium-for-the-Creative-Economy-Report-2015.pdf>.

¹⁸¹ On this, see also Gallup (2018). *Tomorrow's world of work. Agility*, available online at: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/241691/arbeitswelt-morgen-ausgabe-zum-thema-agilitat.aspx>

¹⁸² During the Coronavirus crisis in particular, it was possible to see which companies and organizations had already worked in an Agile manner and thus reacted flexibly and adaptively to the crisis.

¹⁸³ Denning, S. (2019, 8. September). "The Five Biggest Challenges Facing Agile". *Forbes*, available online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2019/09/08/the-five-biggest-challenges-facing-Agile/#763338997b04>

¹⁸⁴<https://saat-network.ch/2016/08/peters-5-question-agility-assessment/>

¹⁸⁵ The learning community included a diverse group of eleven companies in various industries around the world. The founding companies were

- Agile42
- Brillio
- C. H. Robinson International
- Ericsson
- hhpberlin
- Magna International
- Menlo Innovations
- Microsoft
- Riot Games
- SolutionsIQ
- SWIFT

I myself was a member of the learning community as a representative of Magna International.

¹⁸⁶ Final report available at <https://motivate2b.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Learning-Consortium-for-the-Creative-Economy-Report-2015.pdf>.

¹⁸⁷ Denning, S. (2018, 70). *The Age of Agile: How Smart Companies Are Transforming the Way Work Gets Done*. American Management Association.

¹⁸⁸ Denning borrows from the so-called “Blue Ocean” management strategy by Renee Mauborgne and Kim, W. C. (2017) *Blue Ocean Shift. Beyond Competing - Proven Steps to Inspire Confidence and Seize New Growth*. London: Macmillan. The basic idea is that companies should not only operate and compete in established markets but should strive to enter new markets and thus drive innovation. While established markets characterized by “bloody” competition are compared to a red (bloody) ocean, new, fresh markets stand for a blue and oxygen-rich ocean. For more information, visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Ocean_Strategy.

¹⁸⁹ The Agile way of working doesn’t have to be limited to corporate work. Peter Stevens and Maria Matarelli describe how to apply the Agile framework to your personal environment and life in their book *Guide to Personal Agility* (2019).

¹⁹⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2011/07/23/how-do-you-change-an-organizational-culture/#5563fcd39dc>.

¹⁹¹ Pellerin, C. J. (2009). *How NASA Builds Teams: Mission Critical Soft Skills for Scientists, Engineers, and Project Teams*. John Wiley & Sons.

¹⁹² According to Volini, E. et al. (2019). *From Employee Experience to Human Experience: Putting Meaning Back Into Work. 2019 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends. Deloitte.Insights*, most companies worldwide still use an incentive system that primarily measures and rewards individual performance (55%). Only just over one-third of companies reward team performance.

¹⁹³ McDowell, Ehteshami, and Sandell (2019) examined the extent to which creating a more playful environment contributes to higher performance. They conclude that companies that lead the way in creating enjoyable work environments don’t just throw ideas at the wall to find out what works. Rather, they use Big Data and analytics to think strategically about what activities support a climate of joy and adjust accordingly (p. 140).

McDowell, T. et al. (2019). “Are you having fun yet?” *Deloitte.Insights, January* (24), 133-143.

¹⁹⁴ Teller, A. (2016). “The Unexpected Benefit of Celebrating Failure.” *TED2016*, 2016, https://www.ted.com/talks/astro_teller_the_unexpected_benefit_of_celebrating_failure.

¹⁹⁵ The text is a transcript of the video from Spiritual Commerce: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s46M7AGG39I&list=FL-5xTt52ZD-pWAVs1-OTlbvQ&index=9&t=0s>.

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.truepurposeinstitute.com>

¹⁹⁷ F. W. Taylor (1911, 7). *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Harper & Brothers.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Fung, B. (2019). “Google’s tensions with employees reach a breaking point”, available online: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/26/tech/google-employee-tensions/index.html>

¹⁹⁹ Following the quote “What do you do as a leader in order to support a fast-paced innovation process? What is your leadership work? A good reply: ‘My real leadership work is that I facilitate the opening process.’” In *Scharmer* (2009, 314).

²⁰⁰ From an economic theory perspective, this statement leaves the laboratory of neoclassical economics, which understands humans as rational actors with the purpose of optimizing utility. As an economist, I understand the enormous explanatory value of this model. Alas, it reaches its limits when one wants to explain or even predict human behavior in a VUCA world. Frantically clinging to the neoclassical model and defending it denies reality and is a sign that one is trapped in the ivory tower. However, when economists (and I, too, was trained in neoclassical economics) admit and recognize that rational actors are real people and more than just resources in firms, the spectrum of observation opens.

The following authors who have influenced me a great deal during my academic studies, show a different, fresh, and sometimes provocative view on economics:

Eggertsson, T. (1990). *Economic Behavior and Institutions*. Cambridge University Press.

Kahnemann, D. (2012). *Fast thinking, slow thinking*. Settlers

Kahnemann, D. und Tversky, A. (Hrsg.) (2000). *Choices, Values, and Frames*. Cambridge University Press.

North, D. C. (1990, 159). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press.

Nelson, R. R. und Winter, S. G. (1982). *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*. Harvard University Press.

Thaler, R. H. (2016). *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* (W. W. Norton). New York.

I myself explain the limitations of the neoclassical approach in:

Juli, T. (1997). *The Logic of Social Interactions in Foreign Policy: The 1994-1996 US-Chinese Negotiations on Intellectual Property Rights*. University of Miami, online available at <https://motivate2b.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Logic-of-Social-Interactions-in-Foreign-Policy-December-1997-by-Thomas-Juli-all-rights-reserved.pdf>

Juli, T. (1994). *A Rational Choice Model of Trade Policies: Incorporating Institutional Economics into Traditional Game Theory* (Economics Working Papers Archive Washington University in St. Louis No. ewp-it/9410005).

²⁰¹ I’m sure you recognized that I am adapting Kim Polman’s comments on the Golden Rule.

²⁰² The comparison of values, goals, and practices is adapted from Barrett’s 7-stage model of consciousness (<https://www.valuescentre.com/barrett-model/>).

²⁰³ Denning, St. (2018, 250). *The Age of Agile: How Smart Companies Are Transforming the Way Work Gets Done*. American Management Association

²⁰⁴ Critics of agility often argue that the concept cannot be scaled. Apart from the fact that this accusation is not necessarily tenable if we take a look at large companies such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft or Apple, the accusation becomes superfluous if we understand agility as a door opener or catalyst for Human Business.

²⁰⁵ This is consistent with the basic understanding and direction of the Barrett Values Centre, see <https://www.valuescentre.com>.

²⁰⁶ The Appreciative Inquiry approach lends itself to both a workshop and the online format. The workshop approach is more effective and sustainable in that it allows a human space to open up and unfold through interaction. This releases creative energy, which in turn can be very helpful in shaping the company or organization.

²⁰⁷ This format is also known as a “World Café”.

²⁰⁸ The five steps are based on the five phases in a Theory U process according to Scharmer (2009).

²⁰⁹ In Juli, T. (2016, 7). “Excite. Unfolding Organizational Potential and Performance.” In *Project Management Institute Global Congress EMEA 2016*. Barcelona: Project Management Institute, available online at <http://motivate2b.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEA-2016-White-Paper-Excite-FINAL.pdf>. I describe how I applied these five steps, as well as the Appreciative Inquiry and MVP approaches, in an organizational development program for a leading global automotive supplier. This was less about traditional organizational development and more about how plants could unleash their organizational potential.

²¹⁰ Dietmar Zetsche, then CEO of global automaker Daimler AG, initiated a leadership initiative in 2015 that promoted such a project setup and infrastructure.

²¹¹ Own translation of Indset, A. (2019, 254). *Quantenwirtschaft: Was kommt nach der Digitalisierung?* Berlin: Econ. See also Indset, A. (2020) *The Quantum Economy - Saving the Mensch with Humanistic Capitalism*. Berlin: Econ

²¹² The creative economy is part of megatrends such as globalization, new learning, connectivity, and new work. See <https://www.rolandberger.com/en/Insights/Global-Topics/Trend-Compendium/> as well as https://megatrends.fandom.com/de/wiki/Kreative_Ökonomie or Deloitte (2021) *The Future of the Creative Economy*. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-uk-future-creative-economy-report-final.pdf>.

²¹³ Denning, S. et al. (2015, 26). *The Learning Consortium for the Creative Economy: 2015 Report*, available online at: <https://motivate2b.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Learning-Consortium-for-the-Creative-Economy-Report-2015.pdf>.

²¹⁴ Shapiro, G. (2019, X) explains, “Innovate or Die.’ These words are a mandate not just for business, but also for humanity.”

²¹⁵ Andrae, T. (2019) writes in this regard, “The too-late realization is maturing that our German education system can hardly produce the talent required for the 21st century. We see too little encouragement of entrepreneurship, little will to change, no courage to take risks. Our system produces linear tunnel thinkers who make technologies, products and processes four percent better every year.” [own translation]

For a critical analysis of the German education system see <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/plus200046036/Innovation-Das-System-Deutschland-kommt-an-sein-Ende.html>

Nobel Peace Prize winner Mohammad Yunus also denounces the traditional education system when he writes: “The education system should make students creative and encourage them to utilize their creative power to get things done: it should not be a stilted programme to train you to fall at somebody’s feet and serve them for the rest of your life.” (Yunus, M. (2017, 106). “We’ve Jobs.” In K. Polman und S. Vasconcellos-Sharpe (Hrsg.), *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation* (S. 106-109). Reboot the Future.)

²¹⁶ Own translation of Indset, A. (2019, 215). *Quantenwirtschaft: Was kommt nach der Digitalisierung?* Berlin: Econ.

See also Indset, A. (2020) *The Quantum Economy - Saving the Mensch with Humanistic Capitalism*. Berlin: Econ

²¹⁷ Own translation of Precht, R. D. (2018, 198). *Jäger, Hirten, Kritiker: Eine Utopie für die digitale Gesellschaft*. Wilhelm Goldman Publishers.

²¹⁸ See <https://www.microtool.de/wissen-online/was-bedeutet-VUKA/>.

²¹⁹ Own translation of Indset, A. (2019, 83).

²²⁰ Amen, D. G. (2013). *Unleash the Power of the Female Brain: Supercharging Yours for Better Health, Energy, Mood, Focus, and Sex*. Harmony.

²²¹ Own translation of Indset, A. (2019, 110p). *Quantenwirtschaft: Was kommt nach der Digitalisierung?* Berlin: Econ.

See also Indset, A. (2020) *The Quantum Economy - Saving the Mensch with Humanistic Capitalism*. Berlin: Econ

²²² If the statement “the future is female” appeals to you, join the LinkedIn discussion group #TheFutureIsFemale (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8943691/>).

²²³ Shapiro, G. (2019). *Ninja Future: Secrets to Success in the New World of Innovation*. HarperCollins.

²²⁴ Neff, K. (2011) *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*. HarperCollins. www.self-compassion.org.

²²⁵ Sivers, D. (2010). “How to Start a Movement.” *TED2010*, online available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement.

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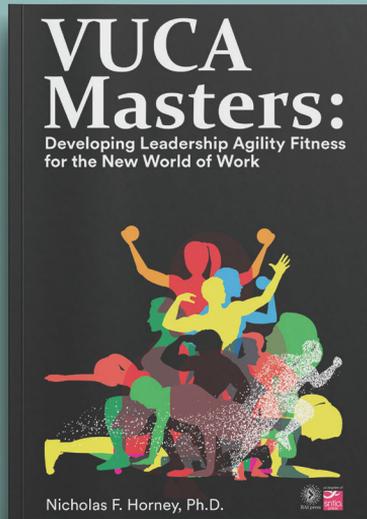
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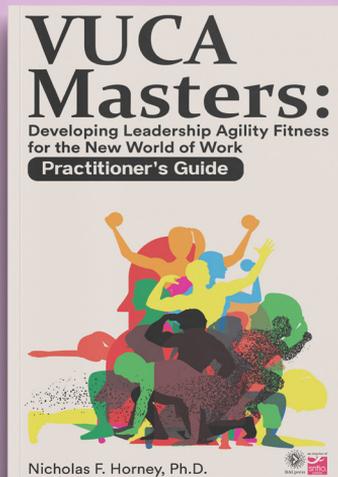
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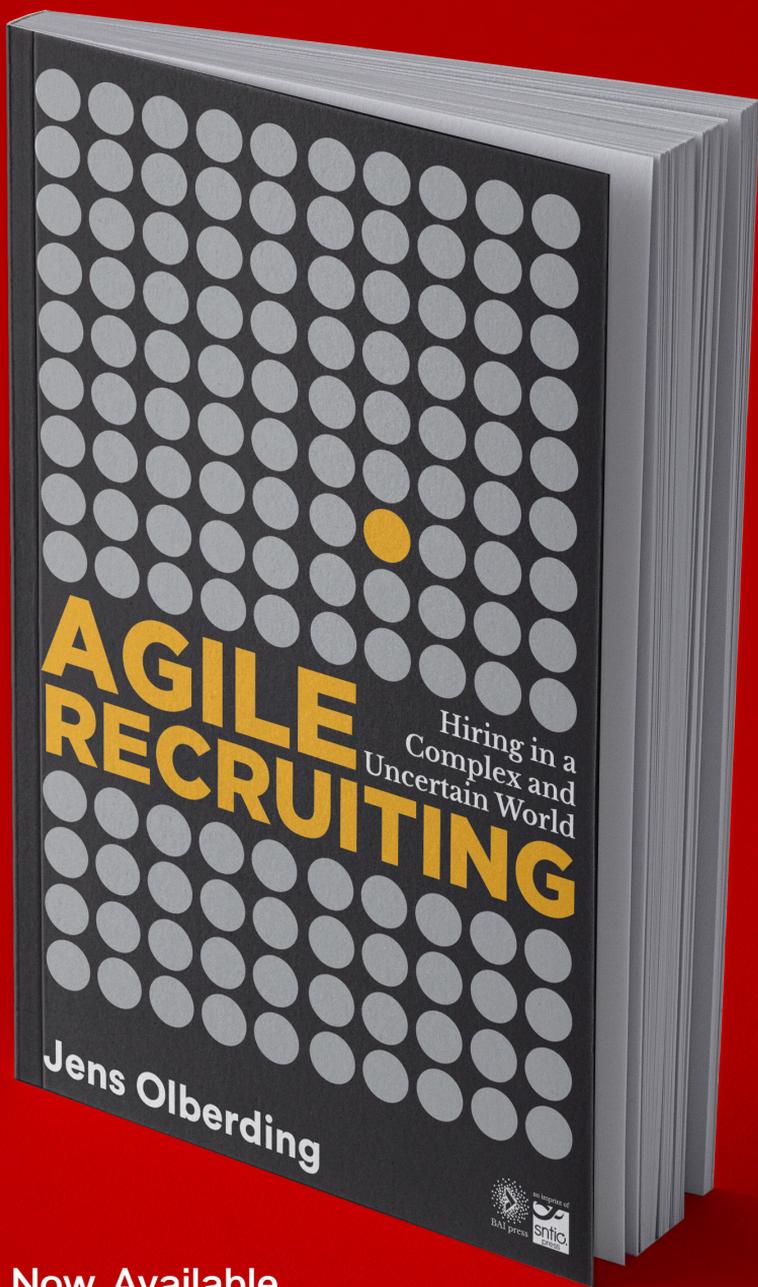
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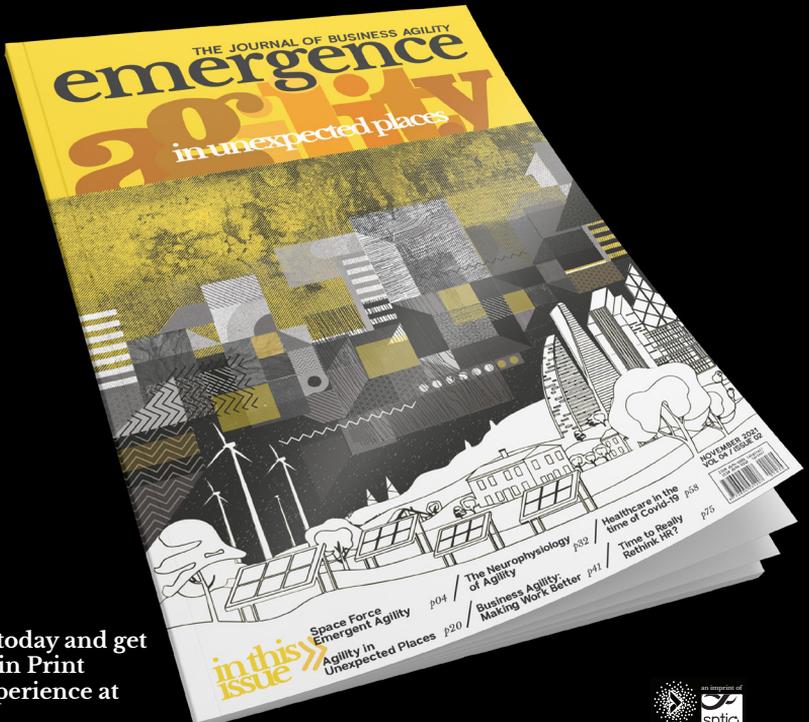


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